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FOUND DEAD

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Dedicated

to

IDA COVENTRY

who, having endured so much for friendship's sake, may, perhaps, endure the association of her name with this exalted and transcendental work until Barnaby does his duty

Found Dead

CHAPTER ONE

If the red-headed girl had not broken her suspender, McTavish would not have looked back. If McTavish had not looked back, I should not have cannoned into him. If I had not cannoned into McTavish, this story would not have been written.

Such, as the philosophers would say, is the apparent chain of causation.

The red-headed girl—wise after the event—sees in it the hand of God. For my part, I am no theologian. I prefer—whatever I believe—to call it a series of accidents. But it is stretching no idle paradox to say that the red-headed girl broke her suspender, and on that broken suspender we hanged a man.

Since everything that happened afterwards turned upon that meeting, I must describe it accurately, from two aspects. Let us take McTavish first.

McTavish, pacing gloomily along Bishopsgate, London, at seven in the evening, when the bustle and crowds of the business day are ended, saw a red-headed girl go limping grotesquely into a small, covered courtyard just by St. Boltolph's Church. As he, in turn, reached the end of this covered courtyard he glanced, as who would not ? to see the attractive creature with the odd gait. His moody pacing carried him past the

entrance, but what he saw caused him to look back for a delectable second, for what he saw was a very pretty knee and a glimpse of a delicately white thigh. The red-headed girl, thinking herself free from observation, had put a foot upon the top step of a convenient office doorway and was trying to attach the two broken ends of her snapped suspender. The next moment he was violently smitten on the shoulder, so that his body was swung half-round, and he faced frankly the Kirtchner-like spectacle.

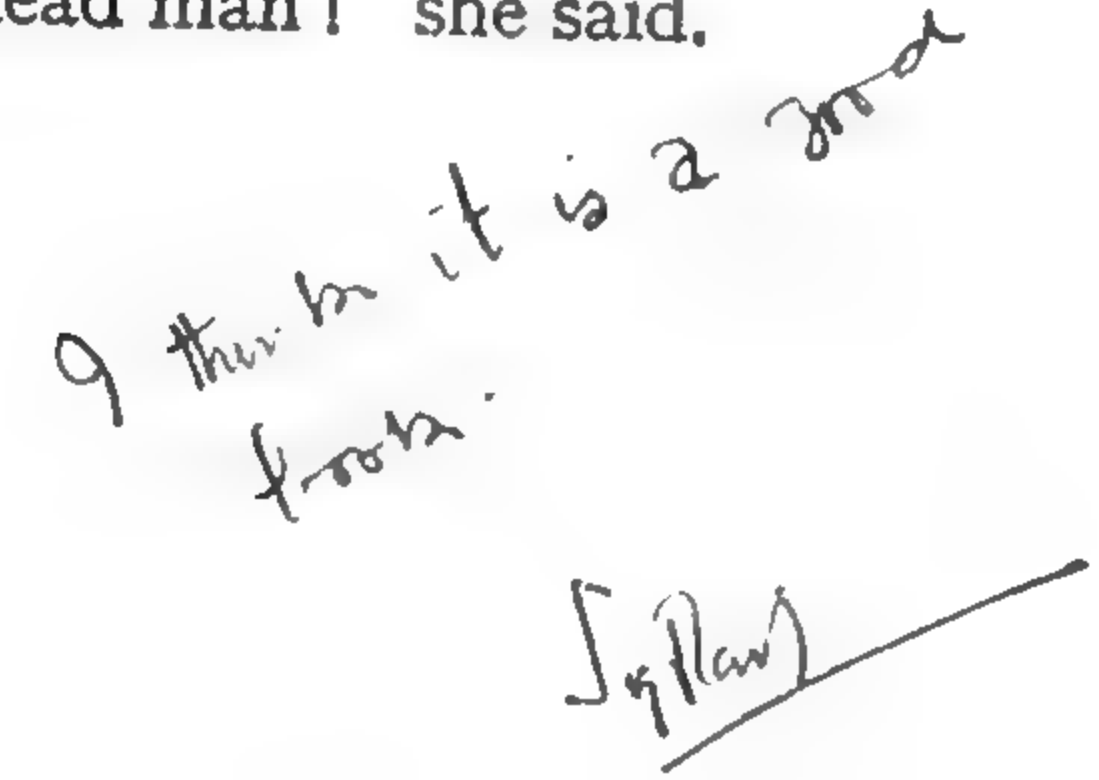
So much for McTavish, and his aspect. My aspect of the meeting was rather more abrupt—more Vorticist, shall I say? I emerged from the offices of the United Bank of Southern Mongolia, where I had been having a long talk—which doesn't in the least concern this story—with a somewhat famous Oriental statesman. As the talk had been longer than I had anticipated, and the hour was later than I liked, since I had to be dressed and ready to dine five miles away by eight o'clock, I came hurriedly from the building, jumped the last three steps with a kind of rightward twist towards Liverpool Street Station, and dashed along Bishopsgate. There was only one other pedestrian within twenty yards of me, and he had ample clearance between the kerb and me. But suddenly the fool looked round and halted in his stride. The result was that I cannoned violently into his left shoulder. We both said "Hell!" and spun round under the force of the impact. The next moment we were gawping like a pair of fools at the red-headed girl who, quite unaware of an audience, was still tying up her broken suspender.

Normally, I suppose, we should both have uttered a vague apology and hurried our respective ways, in case the girl mistook our interest in her temporary

toilet. But there was no normality in what followed. The girl, bending, as you will see, over the steps of the office which she had chosen as a first-aid post, happened to look into one of the basement windows. The whole courtyard was in darkness as far as the buildings were concerned, but was quite adequately lighted as to their exteriors by four street-lamps, set one at each side of the square. Under one of these lamps the girl stood. By its light she saw something through the half-opened basement window which caused her to utter a quick shriek of horror and come running—the broken suspender still unmended—right into the arms of McTavish and me.

She gripped us both, as a child frightened in the dark might grip the first protective adults it encountered.

"A dead man!" she said.



CHAPTER TWO

Up to that moment I had had no chance of observing my companion. I note it now as significant that when the frightened girl gripped us in that way, and almost sobbed out her dramatic phrase, it was not she, but he, who commanded my immediate attention.

Bishopsgate was not so deserted at seven in the evening that the agitated trio we formed on its pavement would go unnoticed by passers-by or the passengers on the omnibuses which travelled its length towards Threadneedle Street. The man into whom I had so forcibly bumped, realizing this, turned the girl round and propelled her and me into the shelter of the little courtyard.

"Say that again," he said calmly to her.

"A dead man," she repeated.

"Ah, you've probably been deceived by the light. It's someone asleep. Come and show me."

He spoke with a kind of comforting undertone to his rich, deep voice. I had never off the stage heard a man speak so slowly and with such measured precision.

He took the arm of the girl in his fingers and walked with her to the steps from which she had seen whatever had startled her, I following a pace or two behind, reduced to nonentity by his personality and his assump-

tion that whatever situation had arisen was his to control.

He was a man of unusual height, with those bottle-neck shoulders which make a tall man seem even taller. There was about him a strange air of medievalism, created partly by the manner of his garb and the carriage of his body. About his shoulders was draped an old-fashioned inverness cape-coat. He wore a round black hat, just sufficiently clerical to make one suspect that here was a dissenting minister given to a little harmless posing. Although the shoulders sloped sharply, they were carried high, so that the rounded back had about it the faintest suggestion of a hump, and the long, lean neck was poked grotesquely forward. The face was round in its contours, but lean, and was decorated with a beak of a nose for which Wellingtonian would have been a kindly adjective. The upper lip was long and tightly drawn over a decisive mouth. The chin came not only forward, but upward. I thought as I looked for the first time on that arresting face, that even so the third witch in "Macbeth" must have looked when the Thane of Cawdor first encountered her, glaring at him over the seething cauldron.

He might have been any age between thirty-five and ninety, for neither the bent figure nor the inscrutable, set face gave any clue as to whether years or thought had so formed them.

But there was nothing evil about the man. He quite positively radiated, as some men do, an aura of good intent. One trusted him instinctively. His mere presence and his measured voice in one's ears were reassurances against fear.

The red-headed girl balked like a frightened horse as they came to the steps.

"It's in there," she said, pointing with a stabbing finger at the window.

The big man went forward and peered in, and I pressed past her and joined him in his scrutiny.

"He's dead all right. What a nasty mess! One of us had better go for a policeman. She can go."

He turned and beckoned the girl, who came, still hesitantly, forward.

"Run to the corner of Threadneedle Street and see if there's a policeman on point-duty. If not, there'll be one at the corner of Leadenhall Street. Tell him all about it. He won't be able to come, but he'll get someone. Oh, damn! They'll be off point, I expect, at this time. Well, try, at any rate. You're almost bound to find one either on point or on his beat. If not, the nearest telephone-box will put you in touch. Come back again, and we'll stay here."

The girl turned and ran off, stopping for a moment to adjust that awkward broken suspender.

My strange companion turned to me.

"I don't know what you think, but I should say the fellow's been choked. Odd, that, in an empty office."

We looked again through the half-open window of the basement room.

The room was obviously unoccupied in any real sense. There were in its corners the litter of some broken packing-cases with their straw, but its only furniture was a rough-wood table and a broken chair. Over the table, his head towards the window, a man lay on his back, his arms outflung and his fists tightly clenched. The face was, even in that half-light, swollen and purple, and the open eyes, seen upside-down from where we stood, stared with a ghastly kind of horror. It was no wonder that the girl, suddenly seeing so

terrible an apparition, had screamed and fled towards the street.

"Hadn't we better do something?" I fatuously asked.

"No. The only thing we can do is to wait for some official person. Then we can go in and see what has really happened. If we start interfering we shall only confuse things and get ourselves heartily disliked." He stepped a pace or two back from the narrow pavement. "What's in this building? Three stories high from ground-level, and a basement storey." He came back to the doorway and examined the plates: "Lyle and Lavender, solicitors. Benhams, the debt collectors. Morton, Morton, Morton and Pleasington. Also solicitors. The Bishopsgate Publicity Agency. Watcham and Jones, importers' agents. Denton's Employment Bureau. All these people seem respectable enough in all conscience. Now the basement. The City Tea and Luncheon Rooms, M. Philpot, proprietor. And here is where a plate has been taken down. That will be the room we've been looking into. Hello, here comes the arm of the law."

A uniformed constable had turned into the courtyard, running at the double. He drew up abreast of us, using the immemorial formula of the Force.

"Now then—what's all this?"

"'Murder, most foul—as at the best it is'," said my companion, his deep, measured voice dropped a few semitones to its most blood-curdling tone.

The red-headed girl, also running, came into view.

"Hey! Murder? The girl said there was a dead man . . ."

"Murdered men are generally dead," said the tall man at my side, not scornfully but patiently, as one

might explain a commonplace to a child. "You'd better have a look at him for yourself—he's in there."

The constable, a smart enough youngster, peered in at the window.

"My God!" he said. "Somebody's done *him* in all right. We'd better wait for the Sergeant and the doctor. I've telephoned for 'em, and the ambulance. And while we're waiting I'll take your names and addresses."

"You'd better take hers first. She found him."

The constable turned to the red-headed girl, who stood a pace or two back, recovering her breath and her colour, for despite her exertions she was still white from her initial fright.

It was now, for the first time, that I really noticed more of her than the shapely leg which had attracted the errant attention of McTavish and me when we had bumped each other such apparent ages but so few real minutes ago. She was, I wrongly surmised, only about eighteen or nineteen years of age, dressed in the mode, with short, provocative skirts, and with her carrotty mop bobbed or bingled, or whatever be the term for that kind of hair-dressing which leaves the face framed but keeps the neck just clear of a thick mass of waves. Her clothes were a little shabby but good. Her hat and shoes were particularly good and well chosen. Her face was round and unusually small, and belied her mode of dress by being unexpectedly ingenuous and pure. There was nothing at all pert or modern about her general deportment, but she gave one the impression of being "able to look after herself", as the phrase goes.

"Now then, missy," said the policeman, producing his official notebook. "There's nothing to be frightened of. Just tell me your name and address."

The girl gave him a quick, suspicious glance and then looked over to us.

"It's all right. You won't be raked in for any great trouble," said my tall companion, giving her a friendly nod.

"My name? Amy Renton. I live at 6 Potter's Walk, Chelsea."

"Amy Renton, 6 Potter's Walk, Chelsea," repeated the constable, noting it carefully down. "And you found the body——"

McTavish intervened.

"All right, officer. Just take the names now. We'll all make our statements when the Sergeant comes."

For a moment I thought the policeman would resent this intervention, but the intervener carried authority.

"Very good, sir. And your name, please?"

"I am Oswald Swete McTavish."

"Scotsman," murmured the policeman to himself as he noted that peculiar trio of names down.

"It's a grave charge to bring against a man on such circumstantial evidence," said Oswald Swete McTavish suddenly, as if startled from a reverie.

"Charge, sir? I'm bringing no charge. We have to have the names for——"

"You charged me with being a Scotsman."

The constable smiled.

"Oh, that, sir. It was only your names."

"'The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children!' My great-grandfather's great-grandfather probably came from Rum, Eigg or Muck."

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"It's all right. Those are three places in Scotland —or off Scotland. I say, for all I know, my remote

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ancestors may have lived there. For myself, I live at number 15a Darchester Square, Mayfair."

The imposing address seemed to reassure the officer of his interlocutor's credentials. His assurance was a little shattered by the tall man's next words.

"Be particular about the 'a'—number 15 is Lord Labernon's Town house. Number 15a is a disused mews. If I were a punster, I should say that my distressing presence under his lordship's windows is caused by my cultivating the mews. It would be quite true, but I won't say it."

The policeman looked at him helplessly. It came to me with a sudden conviction that Oswald Swete McTavish was talking thus to distract the attention of the red-headed girl from the half-open window and the sight it revealed to us. The constable turned to me.

"And your name and address, sir ?"

I told him. He did not put away his notebook, but stood for a moment grasping it at the level of his eyes while he meditatively sucked his pencil.

"Hold that !" said McTavish approvingly. "The Sergeant will be here any moment."

The boyish constable actually had the grace to blush.

There was a clanging bell and a fluster at the end of the courtyard, where a white, official ambulance drew up. The next moment a uniformed Sergeant of Police, another constable, and a gravely clad man in mufti came, in their turn, hurrying towards us.

CHAPTER THREE

THE policeman turned to meet his oncoming superior. No sooner had he stepped a pace away than McTavish whispered to the girl at my side.

"I'll do the talking," I heard him say. She answered him by a grateful uplifting of her long-lashed eyelids.

His words caused me to realize in just what an awkward predicament chance had placed us. A dim courtyard, a young girl provocatively dressed, and two men—and the need to say that the girl had seen the dead man's body when she was repairing a broken suspender! What conclusions would the official mind draw from that? What conclusions could it draw, unless it were untinged by its years of experience and cynicism? An officer avid of arrests might add to the mystery of the dead man a very pretty little case of public misconduct, of "committing a nuisance" or whatever it might prove to be. I was a little annoyed that McTavish's mind had been quicker than mine in scenting the danger. Had the girl told her story, shaken as she still was by her fright, circumstantial evidence might well have seemed to point to the worst construction being placed upon our presence outside the sinister window.

The Sergeant and his companions came upon us. He, too, used the time-honoured formula.

"Now, what's all this about ?"

The constable told him in the stereotyped manner of the drilled evidence-giver.

"When did you first see this ?" asked the Sergeant, turning to the girl.

McTavish intervened, but quite unobtrusively, and answered for her. When he had finished I almost believed that he and I had been striding freely past the top of the courtyard when she had dashed out with her cry of horror.

The Sergeant looked through the half-opened window and then mounted the steps and tried the door, which was locked.

"You've taken the names of these witnesses ?" he said to the constable.

"Yes, sir."

"Then I don't think we need detain you now. You'll be needed for the inquest. Brown, go up to the top and keep people moving. We don't want a crowd. Tell them to bring the ambulance through here."

"But, Sergeant, hadn't we better stay in case——"

The Sergeant shook his head.

"Sorry, sir. I know how tantalizing it is to be left out of a thing like this when you've been in at the start, but the rest is our job. If you really want to assist the police in the execution of their duty, you can't do better than go away and leave us to it. Every additional person here now will add to the confusion. Good night."

There seemed no help for it. We all three said "Good night" and went reluctantly back into the main thoroughfare, where a knot of idlers had already gathered, watching the ambulance. The second police-man was moving them on, but they moved and

returned. I was half-tempted by a morbid interest to share the vague circlings of these spectators. All hopes of being in time for my dinner were gone. I should have to telephone an explanation to my hostess.

We were still a trio as we shouldered our way through the bystanders, who gazed at us with renewed interest as the constable touched the peak of his helmet to McTavish's imposing form.

"Blime! Look there. Mister Punch!" said an impudent young gamin to his friend. It was a just hit. There was something about McTavish, with his almost humped back and his beaky nose and jutting chin, which suggested a grotesquely large Punch. I was to remember that urchin's ejaculation later.

On the kerbstone we paused.

"That's been a queer kind of introduction," said McTavish, taking out of an inner pocket an old-fashioned turnip-watch. "Half past seven. Dinner time. I am reluctant to part from friends so strangely met. M'selle, may I invite you to a three-and-sixpenny meal somewhere? And you, Le Bret?"

I wondered why he called me Le Bret, and then remembered that it was the name of the friend of Cyrano de Bergerac, who, like McTavish, had been cursed with an unduly large nose. It was, I felt, both an indication of his liking for me and a delicate intimation that my presence would be necessary if his whim to entertain her was to be gratified.

Amy Renton was visibly undecided, turning from one to the other of us before she answered.

"I'll eat a meal with pleasure, if Miss Renton will join us. I suppose we can consider that an introduction? . . ." I said, easing her way to an acceptance.

"Well, thank you very much. I would like to dine. But are you sure——" she said.

"We're quite sure," McTavish interrupted her. "The point now is, where shall we eat and how shall we get there? I think a tuppeny bus to Piccy Circus. I know a place just off Wardour Street that's as good as another."

Without more ado he signalled with the large, cudgel-like stick which he carried to a bus and bundled us on to it. London buses, as you may know, have by their doors a seat running fore-and-aft which just takes three passengers nicely. On to this we arranged ourselves, the girl in the middle.

"How do you feel?" I asked her.

"Perfectly dreadful. It's like a dream. And . . ." She stopped and blushed.

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid my stocking will come down."

It was like a girl, confronted with death and disaster, to be worried by a little thing like that. There was a prolonged silence as we jolted on, past the Bank, past the Mansion House, down Cannon Street, past Saint Paul's, and down Ludgate Hill. Amy Renton and I were thinking of the incident which had thrown us together, but McTavish must have been thinking of quite other things. As we crossed Ludgate Circus he said, as if to himself:

"'Why, sir, Fleet Street is very well, but the full tide of human existence is at Charing Cross.' The focal point has shifted a little since Sam Johnson's day. It has moved west. We shall meet the full tide at Piccadilly Circus." He brought his attention to bear on the girl between us. "I suppose you have never heard of Sam Johnson, my dear?"

There was in that "my dear" something endearingly avuncular. One was sure at that moment that the man was sixty if he were a day.

"Oh, yes, I have. I've often read Bozzy."

"What, a chit like you! But I suppose you mean you've skimmed him."

"No. I mean I've read him. And I'm not a chit."

"No more you are. I apologize. You took a scholarship from the High School and went to Lady Margaret Hall."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know. But I make a guess. Is it accurate?"

"Quite accurate. I didn't realize I was such a self evident 'type'."

"Be comforted. You are not. It's I who am gifted with unusual penetration." He laughed. "I guessed you aright, just as I guess aright when I say that our silent friend beside you is an accountant."

I leaned towards him.

"No. You don't guess aright. I am not an accountant."

He laughed again.

"I withdraw my boast. I am *not* gifted with unusual penetration. Next guess. Some kind of Civil Servant."

"That's better," I said. "I'm attached to the Chinese Customs' Service. It is, perhaps, true to say that I am half an accountant. How did you know?"

"Guessed. I hold medals and cups and challenge-shields and gold clocks for guessing—or, at least, I would hold them if they gave them."

Not until we were safely ensconced in a secluded alcove in a little Soho eating-house did he reopen the topic of our respective types and occupations.

"You don't, I notice," he said, after choosing a meal

for us from the too-comprehensive menu, "guess what *I* am. Your manners are better than mine. I am a mass of vulgar curiosity. It's excusable to-night, after that gruesome episode. What a bewildering thing life is. Here are four people who never so much as cross one another's lines of destiny until one of them gets himself killed. By that act the other three are brought together over a dinner-table. From this table what lines of interweaved relationships are prepared? I wonder. I think, after all, that I am a fatalist. But, I was saying, you don't display about me the curiosity I displayed about you. I really can't believe that I am so drab a figure that I don't arouse some interest in you. It is your shyness, your delicacy. Well, I'll tell you. You have heard of the tragic comedian often enough. He's the stock figure in literature and opera. I'm his antithesis. I'm the comic tragedian."

"Are you an actor?" asked the girl, wonderingly, surveying our strange host as if he baffled comprehension.

"God forbid! I am something more real than an actor. I meant that whatever force is behind our biology fashioned my exterior for tragedy and my interior for comedy. I have the face and figure of a student; I have the mind of a *flaneur*. When I was an undergraduate I looked like a Don. When they made me a Don I was intolerable because I thought and behaved like an undergraduate. I have tried about seven different ways of making a living since I resigned my Fellowship, and they have all failed. My last job was editing *The Little Tots' Weekly*. I was dismissed for flippancy. Before that I wrote leading articles for *The Catholic Dawn*. They objected to my paradoxes. For seven months I was organizing secretary to the

Society for the Promotion of International Relationships. They thought I looked the part, but after the first three months they couldn't sustain the belief that I acted it. I can always find a place in any serious endeavour. I get in, as theatrical people say, 'on my face'. But they find I don't live up to it. On the other hand, nobody will look at me for any enterprise that is in the least light-hearted and flippant. I am just not grotesque enough to be funny, you see. At present I am out of a job."

"So am I," said the red-headed girl dolefully.

"But, fortunately, I have a little money."

"So have I," she responded again, a little more cheerfully.

"Now, you," he said, turning to me, "won't know what it means to be out of a job. You have been bred in a tradition which makes a man think that as soon as he comes down from his University a job of work is waiting for him, a rôle to be filled, into which he steps and in which he stays and distinguishes himself all his days. I suppose you are home on a long leave ?"

"Six months," I said. "I arrived last week."

The shabby little waiter came with the *hors d'œuvres*.

"I suppose the sight of a dead man is no novelty to you ? They tell me China is littered with 'em."

"I've seen a good many, and, of course, the War was a bit of an introduction to sudden death."

"Ah, you, too, were in that vulgar brawl, were you ? But a litter of corpses on a battlefield is a very different thing from an isolated corpse in the middle of ordered civilization, don't you find ?"

"Very different."

"It arouses one's curiosity so terribly, quite apart

from the stimulating shock to one's nerves. Take our friend of this evening. Why should anyone choose the basement of a set of City offices to be murdered in? What set of circumstances brought a man there to meet his death?"

"We shall probably learn that at the inquest."

"Not we. The inquest will bring in a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

"Why do you assume it was a murder?" asked Amy Renton, discarding her plate, to which she had given an attention worthy of some famishing farm-boy, and taking up the glass of cheap burgundy which McTavish had poured for her. "It may have been some kind of stroke."

"A man doesn't lean elegantly over a table to have a stroke. That suffused face was the face of a man throttled. The posture was the posture of a man attacked. Why was he throttled? Why was he attacked? Who attacked him? Why did they attack him in that particular room? Do you realize, my children, that he was probably done to death just at the time when those offices above and around him were pouring out the people who work in them?"

"Hold hard," I said, "that's a wide surmise. We saw him just after seven o'clock. He may not have been dead more than half an hour."

"I think longer than that. He was very rigid. But that is one of the things the inquest will tell us."

Amy Renton shuddered.

"Let's forget him. He'll haunt me to-night. I want to enjoy my dinner, if I can. I've had nothing since breakfast, except a sandwich and a cup of coffee at noon."

"Why this asceticism? Economy?"

"Partly. Almost wholly. I've been job-hunting, you see. That was what brought me to Bishopsgate."

McTavish, with his grim witch's face, brooded over her for a moment.

"I'll give you a job, if you want one," he said at length.

"You? But I thought you were . . ."

"Looking for a job myself? So I am. But that's different. I can afford to pick and choose, you see. I told you, I have a little money. It's enough to enable me to afford a temporary secretary, if I want one. As a matter of fact, it's ten thousand a year."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE girl drew her breath sharply.

"Ten thousand a year?"

"Yes. It sounds preposterous, doesn't it? A man with ten thousand a year and can't keep a job! It comes to me from an uncle. He made the capital by rack-renting in Ireland. He had a flair for speculation, which he called investment. I took everything out of gold mines and tin-dredging schemes and concession exploitations and put it all in trustee securities. I have a simple mind, you see. I waste most of the income on other people's fads, and try to live on what I earn. I'm a bit of a crank, you see, that way. But don't let's talk of it. I have a nasty puritan streak in me. It's been subsumed out of my morals into my economics."

"But I don't want a job out of charity."

"You won't get one from me. If you take my job you'll earn every penny I give you."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to humour my insatiable curiosity. I want to find out why that dead man died. I'm going to try a little private sleuthing. It's one of the things I've never done."

"But I'm not the right person to help in that kind

of thing. Why, the sight of that—that—that man to-night nearly made me sick with terror."

"No wonder. But you'll be all right. I'm not going to look for more dead men. I'm going to look for the live ones who manufactured that one. You see, I owe him a debt of gratitude."

He gesticulated over the table to where she and I sat facing him, to make his compliment clear.

"Hold hard," I said again; "how do you know there'll be any private sleuthing necessary? The police will probably have the fellow in no time. I've a lot of faith in the police."

"So have I. But one can't help remembering that last week there was a butcher savagely killed with his own cleaver at Blackburn. They haven't found his murderer yet."

"Oh, give them time."

"Ten days ago a girl was most abominably killed and mutilated on Putney Common. They haven't found her murderer yet. Three weeks ago a man called Peter Roose, a Cape Dutchman, was outed in a railway carriage coming up from Southampton. They haven't got his murderer yet. Early in the summer General Blenkiron was killed in his rooms in Half Moon Street. They haven't found his assassin yet. And one can't help remembering, too, that these were obvious murders. How many deaths may there not have been in which the murder which caused them was not even detected? I've every faith in the police. They do wonders. But they can't do everything, for a variety of reasons. They have too much on their plates, for one thing. They have the defects of their organization, for another. It's true they can comb the country with a fine-toothed comb, or block the ports,

or secure witnesses. But there are some things they can't do. Any intent and determined man with a little ability, ready to set aside everything for the one end, and with means to employ help when he needs it, might do what the police cannot do. At any rate, I mean to try."

I shook a reproving head.

"It won't work outside the pages of a popular magazine or a seven-and-sixpenny thriller. Life is far too sane and humdrum."

"Sane and humdrum! Life! My dear fellow, it's the novelists' fictional world that is sane and humdrum. No novelist dare suggest one tithe of the oddities of life, or use one tithe of its queer coincidences. He'd be laughed down by every reviewer in England. Have you ever written a popular novel?"

"Never."

"Ah. I've written one or two. You may have read 'em. My pseudonym is Alfred Bruce."

"Are you Alfred Bruce?" asked Amy Renton. "I've read something of yours. It was called *The King-Pin*. I enjoyed it."

"Thank you. So did I. But what I was going to say was that anybody who has written thrillers knows very well that half his endeavour is to keep out the haphazard relationships and lucky coincidences with which life itself teems. You read the history of a few famous trials and you'll soon discover what a part these things play. But to come to business. Assuming that the official police don't get their man between now and the inquest—which they certainly won't—and assuming that the inquest results in an open verdict of murder—which it certainly will—I'm determined to have a shot myself at what I've so often set my charac-

ters doing in those absurd novels of mine. My confounded ineptitude has prevented me from being hitherto a good Don, a successful organizing secretary, a sound leader-writer, a tolerable editor of a children's newspaper, a publisher's literary adviser, a politician's secretary or more than a fifth-rate writer of popular novels. Every one of those jobs, you'll notice, means the acceptance of some kind of discipline. Sleuthing for a murderer or a gang of murderers won't have that disadvantage. I might manage it.

"Just before I saw you to-night, my dear, I was meditating accepting a lecture tour. I hate lecturing. You caught my eye, and then ran us into this affair of the dead man. Well, let us see it through together. Be my secretary, I'll pay you whatever the trade union rate for a secretary of your qualifications may be, and I'll provide and expect quite formal references of character, so that you need have no fear that you are being ensnared by a white-trader or anything melodramatic of that kind. This is Friday. You could begin on Monday. That'll probably be the inquest day. What do you say?"

To a slip of a girl who had been out all day hunting for a job there was only one answer possible, but, even so, she hesitated a little.

"If I thought . . ." she began.

"If you thought I really needed a secretary, you'd jump at it? Well, let me say this, quite calmly and deliberately, if you don't take the job someone else will have to."

"Then I'll take it, gratefully."

"Good. I only lay down one condition. No followers allowed."

They both laughed at this.

"Except, of course, Ching Lung Soo, over there," added McTavish.

"Ching Lung Soo?"

"The Chinese Customs wallah at your elbow. He thinks he disapproves of me and my whimsies, but he doesn't really. I see the lust of conquest in his eye. He'll come gunning with us after he's had a night's sleep."

If this strange bird were serious, I quite deliberately told myself, I didn't see why I shouldn't. A six-months' long leave in England, with no family left and no real ties, could be as well filled that way as any other. But I wasn't convinced at that moment, either that he was serious or that the police would leave him any scope for his private sleuthing. And yet the memory of that distorted face, and of the thrill of emotion which had stirred me when the girl had first tumbled out the words: "A dead man!" worked in me as they had obviously worked in him. I resented being turned away by the police from what, illogically, I already regarded as our own mystery. I was as curious as he to discover all that lay behind that death in the City.

McTavish was watching me with a laughing gaze. He thought me, no doubt, a staid, commonplace specimen, as, indeed, I am, compared with eccentrics like him.

"I'll go this far before I sleep on it," I told him; "if the inquest does return that verdict, and if the police don't get their man, or some trace of him by then, I'll join forces with you."

"Done!" said he. "Waiter, another bottle of this Beaune and an evening paper." He turned to us. "It should be in the last editions. Let us see what it was we really ran into."

CHAPTER FIVE

When I awoke next morning I had that not unfamiliar feeling that the actual events of the previous night were but parts of a dream. The morning paper, which I read over the early tea which the chambermaid of my hotel brought to me at eight, dispelled any such illusion. It contained a slightly fuller account of the finding of the body than had been in the evening sheet which we had read over our Soho dinner-table, but in neither was there any mention of our own names.

I was distrustful enough of my fellow-men to spend some little time after my breakfast in an attempt to discover the bona-fides of my strange companion of the previous night. It occurred to me that if, as he had said, he had been a Fellow of his College he would be in *Who's Who*, and there, indeed, he was. I read the entry with interest :

McTavish. Oswald Swete, o.s. of late Oswald McTavish and Elizabeth Swete, daughter of late Sir Lionel Swete, K.C.B. Born, 1887. Educated Wellinbro' School, Cardinal's College, Cambridge. Fellow (Economics), 1909-1912. Publications : *The Social Factor in Monetary Theory* (1911). *The Hansa Towns* (1914). *A Private in Flanders* (1919). *The Peace Conference from Within* (1924). Has also written a number of novels under pseudonym of Alfred Bruce.

There followed his address in Mayfair and the name of some Irish castle.

My next step was to stroll over to the Megalithm Club, where, if he were in Town, I might find my cousin, himself a Fellow of Cardinal's College and about the same age as McTavish. He was in the club, but, as that ancient institution makes no preparation for visitors and forbids them access to any room except a small cubby-hole off the great hall, I dragged him out, and we went over to the Junior Merchants. The Junior Merchants, I should say, in passing, has no connection with merchandize. It is a cheaper offshoot of the Merchants' Club, which is, I think, the oldest club in London, and which confines its membership to members of the ancient livery companies which have themselves lost all touch with the trades of which they were once the guilds.

My cousin, Dr. James Adam Adams to the world at large and "Jah" to his family and friends, settled himself in one of the big couches and decided that eleven o'clock was a good time to drink pink gin. Coffee was my own choice.

We exchanged a few commonplaces about the change in each other since we had last met, and swopped family news. As my nearest relative, "Jah" comported himself flippantly and chaffed me for several minutes about a mythical yellowness of skin and an equally mythical paunch that he said he detected since my last leave from China. At last we wound down to generalities.

"Tell me," I said, "do you know a queer bird who was once one of your Dons, named McTavish ?"

"Jah" raised his glass and waved it.

"Oh, sweet McTavish ! I should think I do. Who doesn't ? He's what the novelists call a character. We were exact contemporaries. Only I was at King's, you know. I'd no real touch with Cardinal's until I bagged

my Fellowship. But everybody knew McTavish of Cardinal's. He took a brilliant pair of firsts, and would have been President of the Union, only he had a row with Macklin and went off in a huff. He's written a classic on the history of monetary theory. The trouble is that he has a lot of bees in his bonnet. Insisted on serving as a Tommy all through the War. They raked him out after the Armistice and sent him to the Peace Conference. He played old Hamlet there, you know. Keynes was mild compared with O. S. M.

"He's done a lot of queer things since, edited a babies' magazine or something equally fatuous; been half a dozen things. My belief is that there's a method in his madness. He's probably preparing some huge tome about life and labour. It's the kind of thing he would do. He's a bit of a poseur, but he has quite a genuine streak of buffoonery in him. Can't stand discipline, you know."

"But I thought you said he was a private during the War?"

"So he was. And what a private! They made him orderly-man in the officers' mess to keep him out of the way of the Company Sergeant-Major. He was a surprisingly good fighter, though, I'm told. A Fellow of Cardinal's as orderly-man! Rather good, that, you know. Where did you knock up against him?"

"Oh, we met casually. Rather a striking personality, I thought."

"Yes, he's most decidedly that. He'll probably end by founding a religion or something. He's a kind of genius gone off the rails. I haven't seen him for ages. The last time we met was rather funny. He'd just been hurled out of the Jollity music-hall."

"Was he drunk?"

"Drunk? Good Lord, no! But he'd poured a small whisky down the neck of old Lord Lushington. Lushy, being one of the principal shareholders of the place, and not liking his amours with one of his own barmaids interrupted, made a scene, and O. Swete McTavish was hurled out. O. S. M. told me that he'd only wanted to cool the ardour of a satyr, but I expect he was a bit dippy on the girl himself. Another of his oddities is that he doesn't like Scotsmen."

"I suppose he's straight enough?"

"He ought to be; he's rolling in money, which he won't spend on himself."

"Oh, I didn't mean money."

"Generally straight? He's one of the straightest men I've ever met. Why?"

"You were saying about his being dippy on a barmaid."

"Oh, his admiration is quite æsthetic. He's a devout High Churchman at heart. If they let *him* loose in Bengal he wouldn't snoop a rupee or even tickle a virgin."

"Jah" leaned back appreciatively.

"What about buying me another of this pink gin? I don't really admire your club, but its gin is good. And they tell me you have a famous library. Talking of McTavish, you must have heard of the verses in the *Cantab Magazine*—a rondeau beginning with his name, you know, O. Swete McTavish, and ending each verse with the apostrophe to him—the other spelling—'O, sweet McTavish!'—damned clever they were. That's why nobody calls him anything but O, sweet McTavish, or by his initials. That alone is a sign of greatness, isn't it? Like everybody calling Oscar Browning 'O.B.' or calling Balfour 'A.J.B.' *I* might have been so dis-

tinguished if only my wretched initials hadn't made a phonetic word. . . ."

"Well," I said, "for a man honoured in three Continents, you've a funny idea of greatness."

"Pooh, academic greatness! I'm a disciple of O. S. M.'s there: there's nothing to it. The real greatness is being in a *Punch* cartoon and having jokes made about you on the music-halls. Even 'O, sweet McTavish' hasn't reached that yet."

"But he may," I said.

"May? He will! With a make-up and a mind like his, he can't avoid it sooner or later. What, must you go? Then I suppose I'll have to pay for my own lunch. . . . Give my love to O. S. M. if you see him again."

"I shall certainly see him again," I said.

CHAPTER SIX

DESPITE the fuss which the papers made of the finding of the dead man, the inquest on the Monday was a tame affair. McTavish and Amy and I were in attendance, but only she and he were required to give evidence, and that evidence was very formal. She described how, when stooping to mend a broken shoe-strap, she had seen the dead man and had rushed back to the main street in a momentary panic. He told of how she dashed out in her agitation straight to where he happened to be passing, and of how he and I had gone down to the window and sent her for a policeman.

There was, after the police evidence, an adjournment for a week.

The inquest was held at eleven in the morning, and McTavish had arranged that we should eat luncheon with him in a neighbouring City chop-house. Avoiding the attentions of the reporters, who, naturally enough, pressed all three of us for a story, we made our way to the appointed bourne, and in a few minutes were discussing a well-grilled sole and a bottle of Niersteiner.

We were a little too early to be caught by the full rush of lunchers, and had one of the little pew-like cubicles to ourselves.

"I like this place," said McTavish ; "Mr. Pickwick stayed here. Much more satisfactory to me, for some absurd reason, to eat in a house where Pickwick ate than in a house where some really existent celebrity ate. Wouldn't Dickens have enjoyed that inquest ?"

"It was rather disappointing to me," said Amy Renton. "It didn't seem to me to lead us anywhere."

"No, perhaps it didn't. But wait until we have the verbatim report, and then it'll be more significant."

"There won't be a verbatim report," I said. "The papers'll just take the cream of it and dress it up a bit."

"There'll be a verbatim report for us. I've ordered one. I've also asked Inspector Ipps to dine with us to-night."

"Inspector Ipps ? Who's he ? He didn't give evidence, did he ?"

"No. But he's the Yard man who is taking the case up."

"How did you find that out ?"

McTavish looked at me with a whimsical pity, with which I was to become so familiar in our future relationships.

"I asked somebody," he said.

"Do you know the fellow ?"

"Who ? Ipps ? No. Not yet. But I shall, when he's dined with us."

"Why should he dine with us ?"

"Because, my good fellow, it's part of his job now to check us up, the three of us. It's all right, Amy." (I noticed that when he called her Amy she flushed a little but did not seem to resent it.) "He doesn't

suspect us of telling the Coroner anything but the truth, only they have to make certain. When I found he was on the case I dropped him a note."

"What did you say?"

"Only that as we'd found the body, we might be able to save his time by telling him about it in more detail than the Sergeant or the coroner's court had required. What we really want him for, of course, is not to tell him what we know, but to get out of him what he knows. Everything will turn on what kind of fellow he is. If he's the dour, over-official type, who suspects all meddlers, we shall not get much forrader. But if he's the genial type—well, there's our ticket to the private view, so to speak. They run to types at the Yard, I fancy. Some of them ferret out what they want to know. Some of them don't ferret at all, but simply induce people to tell 'em by sheer geniality and ingenuousness.

"It is pretty certain that Ipps, whatever kind of fellow he is, won't relish anybody nosing round like a cheap imitation Sherlock Holmes. My game to-night will be to give him the impression of a mildly academic cove, shocked a little by being brought up against a real-life tragedy, and anxious to bring the perpetrator to justice by giving what help I can to the official police. My attitude won't be: 'I say, what the hell's all this?' but 'Dear, dear! Do these things, then, really happen?' You will have to be rather bored by the interruption of your leave, annoyed at being kept in Town for the inquest. You, Amy, must be all twittering nerves, relying on the good, kind detective to prevent any other fools from being strangled and left about for innocent young girls to find."

."That will be easy enough, for it's what I really feel about it all."

"Good. Now what about a little apple-pie to follow ? They make an excellent apple-pie here. Most places give you a dollop of stewed apple and a section of pastry, and call it pie. This place gives you a portion of genuine pie, with the apples and crust baked together."

We were just finishing this highly commended—and highly commendable—pie when a boy entered the far end of the room. Many more lunchers had drifted in, and the boy went from pew to pew peering at them. He stopped at our cubicle.

"Here you are, sir. Please will you sign for it. Mr. Monroe says he's made four duplicates, as you said. He says the bill will be sent on on Friday."

McTavish took the package, gave the boy a sixpence, and dismissed him.

"The verbatim reports. Better not open them here. And better not have our coffee here. I know a good place a few minutes away — a pukka coffee-lounge. By the way, Armistead, where are you staying ? At your club ?"

"No ; at an hotel. Why ?"

"Well, if we're going to see this thing through, why not come and bed down at my place ? It isn't, I grant you, much of a place, because I've been trying to run it on what I earn, but it isn't bad. We could buy a camp-bed for you. It would be better for us to be together for many reasons. And Amy would be more comfortable working there in the daytime if there were two of us."

"Oh . . . " began Amy, but her new employer waved her into silence.

"I don't see why I shouldn't," I said tentatively.

"Then you will. When we've had coffee we'll order a bed for you from the Civil Service Stores and go on to my place and read this report. That'll give us time for a cup of tea and a chat before we meet Inspector Ipps."

"Where are you dining him?"

"At the South Park Hotel, quite near to Darchester Square. We'll have to do him well, you see. Now that I've started a genuine business of my own I've decided I'm justified in capitalizing it, so I've drawn out a pot of money."

"Talking of money, hadn't we better come to some arrangement about my share of the expenses?"

"Oh, that's all right. You see, I've got the stuff. I don't suppose you have. If you feel dickey in your conscience about it, you can give a handful of coin now and again to Amy, for minor disbursements like tea and cigarettes and taxi-fares. As our private secretary, she becomes automatically honorary housekeeper and *ex-officio* keeper of the privy purse. If it weren't for these damned conventions we'd install a camp-bed for her, too. But now let us move over to the coffee-lounge and then home to master this verbatim report."

The verbatim report needed little mastering. All it told us was that the body of a man unknown, and so far not in any way identified, had been found in the basement of Number 4 St. Matha's Court. His pockets had apparently not been emptied—a list of their contents was given—but nothing he carried gave any clue as to who or what he might be. His linen was not new, but was not laundry-marked. He was described in the police evidence as being a "well-nourished" man of between forty and fifty, about five

feet seven inches in height, wearing a brown suit, white shirt, single collar with a bow tie of brown poplin, artificial brown silk socks, brown shoes with pointed toes. His hair was described as thick and long, and he wore a close-cropped but full moustache. He carried a plate of three false teeth in the upper jaw, and two of the lower teeth had been filled with a gold filling. There was a mole on the left cheek, an old scar on the inner left forearm, and a bruise, the cause of which was obvious, across the back.

"It still doesn't convey much to me," said Amy.

"Ah; it conveys quite a lot to me. How many people do you know who habitually carry nothing with them that could be an aid to identification?"

"Quite a lot," said Amy.

"You mean women. How many do you know, Armistead?"

I thought carefully for a moment.

"Nobody, I fancy."

"Nor do I—except the very penurious. Let us take our own cases." He began to turn out his pockets like a schoolboy hunting for some lost treasure. "What have we here? A pocket-book positively stuffed with letters addressed to me or bearing the address of the senders. A few old visiting-cards. Two club membership cards, old, but still a means of immediately tracking me. A handkerchief with a laundry-mark. A bunch of keys—one has actually a maker's name still legible and is obviously made for some kind of cash-box with a patent lock. A watch with an inscription, saying to whom and by whom presented. True, I might have bought it second-hand or stolen such a watch, but even so, it could be used

to trace me. I've no doubt that your pockets are just as good a guide, Armistead ?"

"Probably better. I carry far too much in them."

"So ! But this warrior, you see, carries nothing. What does that mean ? Of two things, one. Either he had taken care not to have on him anything of a personal kind, or he was the one man in ten thousand who never has such things on him. We can dismiss the second of these."

"Hold hard. Although his pockets hadn't been emptied, they may have searched them, just in case . . ."

"No. That won't do. First, we saw him forced back across a table, strangled. His back was bruised by the force with which he had been so thrust down. An attack of that sort in such a place and at such a time, with windows capable of being accidentally overlooked, would not be followed by any such search. Second, how could the assailant know that his collar or shirt was not marked by his laundry or even with his name ?"

"But that doesn't carry us far, Mr. McTavish."

"My dear Amy, be patient. What else does the description suggest ? A foreigner."

"Oh, come !" I protested. "That's a bit far-fetched, surely."

"It is a bit far-fetched. But it's probably accurate. Let me run over the points of direction leading to my conclusion. We find the man in a courtyard office off Bishopsgate."

"What of that ?"

"What is one of the main characteristics of Bishopsgate ?"

"Near to the Stock Exchange," I said.

"It has the oldest church in London in it," said Amy.

"Yes. And it is paved, and the sky is above it, and men walk on its pavements and vehicles run down its roadway. What is one of the main characteristics ?"

"It has a lot of banks and it is near the river," I said, beginning to see his drift.

"Quite. Lombard Street, Gracechurch Street and Bishopsgate are the very heart of the Money Market—they are, with their environs, what we loosely call the 'City' in a financial sense. Within ten minutes' walk of one another you'll find branches of every important foreign bank in the world. Within another ten minutes' walk you'll find a river which carries more foreign trade than any other. Within a tuppenny bus-ride you'll find half the foreign quarters of London, either East or West. Now consider our dead man. Thick hair and full moustache, pointed shoes, poplin tie and artificial silk stockings, carefully matched suit and tie, foreign or American dentures, as the dentists' advertisements call 'em."

"How do you know that ?"

"Because I think that the police would have been on the track of the craftsman otherwise."

"No, I can't admit that. There's little to choose between one dental-plate and another, and, as for filling, you simply couldn't tell who'd done it. And if the police had whipped round all the dentists in London there'd still be the provincials."

"We may be quite sure that every dentist has had a description and a query. The police at the inquest admit flatly that they've no clue to the identity of the man. It is a fair assumption that the work was done abroad."

"I still don't admit that."

"Well, no matter. You will at least admit that on what I have said the man may very well be a foreigner?"

"I think it possible, but no more than that. There are dozens of men who might have the characteristics you've enumerated and still be English."

"I'll bring up another point. The man was a careful dresser, was he not? He chose his tie to match his suit, he wore good socks . . ."

"They were only *artificial* silk."

"My dear Armistead! You are the type of sturdy Briton who wears wool in winter and cotton in summer. If you'd ever been a dainty dresser you'd realize that nobody but an ass wears genuine silk socks for day wear. They are not tough enough, and they are absurdly dear compared with their more efficient substitutes. I say the man was a careful dresser. It is a fair inference that he had his clothes made to order by a reasonably good tailor. Do you know any tailor in England who fails to put your name and his own on a small tab inside the top of an inner pocket?"

"But that may have been taken out."

"Quite true. But had it been taken out there would most probably have been some trace of it. The police whatever their faults, are at least thorough. That suit has been subjected to a close scrutiny. There was no mention this morning that means of identification had been removed, but only that they were not there."

"I suppose the police would tell such a thing at an inquest?"

"At such an inquest, yes. They would give nothing away by such frankness."

"Well, admitting, for the moment, your point that

the man is probably a foreigner, and that he had some reason for not carrying any means of identification with him, what then ?"

"Well, surely we are a step nearer our real starting-point ? What are the two great indications of a murderer ?"

I shook my head. My education, even from popular fiction, had been neglected.

"Means and motive, my dear fellow. There is one kind of murder which, without a witness, it is practically impossible to bring home. That is the murder which is thoroughly commonplace, a murder committed by undetectable means for no personal motive."

"You might elaborate that."

He began patiently to explain.

"If I am known to bear you a deep grudge, and if I have in my possession a can of weed-killer, and if you are found dead, poisoned by weed-killer, I am immediately suspect."

"True."

"But if I've never seen you in my life and am moved to murder you out of sheer mania—if, that is, there is nothing to connect us—and if I stab you suddenly with a stiletto on the fringe of an excited mob watching a football match and then move silently away, why should I be suspected ? No motive."

"But the means—the stiletto ?"

"Precisely. If they could trace the means to me, they have me. But supposing I suddenly desire to kill you, and in a surge towards an underground train I manage to push you on to the track ?"

"No witnesses to the deed, no motive—and unsuspected means . . . yes . . . I see."

"Let us suppose that the man Amy found was killed in error. . . ."

"In error?"

"Yes. Suppose that the murderer, or murderers, thinking he was some quite other man, lured him into the basement room, strangled him with gloved hands, and then made off unseen. *There* would be a terrible task for any investigator. The motive would be quite missing and the means not of a kind to be traced to any particular person. But if he be the right man—the right man from the murderer's viewpoint I mean—the motive might be discoverable.

"If he turned out to be a political informer, for example, or one of a gang of criminals who had at some time turned King's evidence, or a man known to have outraged the sanctity of some other man's home—then we should have some kind of line leading towards at least a possible culprit. He may be none of these things. That we have to find out for ourselves, unless the excellent Ipps has found it out for us.

"Talking of Ipps, it is time we prepared ourselves for our meal with him. I told him morning dress; he wouldn't have come otherwise. Everything now depends upon the reaction of the excellent Ipps to three curious and possibly prying citizens whose interference he will probably resent once he has extracted from them what little they have to tell. Being what he is, he'll be as cunning as a serpent. I shall produce myself, for his benefit, as the celebrated Indian snake-charmer. *Allons, camerados!* Let us move over to the South Park Hotel. And let me beseech you, Armistead, not to ask for chop suey or chopstocks."

"Why should I ?" I stupidly asked him.

"I thought those were part of your Chinese customs," he asininely replied. "However, we shall be lucky if the main article of our diet isn't an edible mare's-nest, kindly supplied by Inspector Ipps."

CHAPTER SEVEN

O. Swete McTavish had ordered a private room at the hotel, and it was there that we awaited with some eagerness the arrival of our guest.

If Inspector Ipps was indeed as cunning as the serpent, he looked as innocent as the dove. I think I have never seen a man who gave such an impression of charming guilelessness, of such utter and complete ingenuousness. He was a heavy, portly man, with a round, pink face and big, babyish eyes of a very light blue. His silky hair was quite silvern and lay smoothly across the high forehead, and his mouth seemed bowed in a kind of perpetual pout of pleased gratification at the sugar-plums which life so often popped into it. He wore a low, turned-down collar, with a bow-tie of blue-and-white spotted silk, and across his ample middle-man was stretched a buff-coloured waistcoat. When he spoke his voice was a mellow tenor, and was perceptibly tinged with an American accent. I learnt afterwards that for many years he had spent most of his days either crossing the Atlantic or working with the American authorities on the other side.

They had so chaffed him about his English accent that he had adopted their own intonation in self-defence, and what had begun as a frank affectation remained as an ineradicable second-nature. His great affection for, and

belief in, America and the Americans was sufficient to make him regard as a compliment a mistake as to his own nationality. He spoke longingly of a not-too-far-distant day when he should retire and find a home on what he always called "the rock-bound coasts of Maine".

All this we learnt of him later. That evening we were merely aware of his unexpected figure on the threshold of our little room, unexpected because one, at least, of us had anticipated a gaunt sleuthhound of a man, and another of us had prepared himself for a sturdy ex-police officer of the regulation model. I think Amy Renton was the more disappointed. Inspector Ipps was not, at first sight, as thrilling a personality as the Holmes-like detective of her imagination. He was much more so than an average ex-constable would have been.

Of the two men, McTavish was the taller, but Ipps the heavier. They looked an odd pair as they greeted each other, the one with his bent shoulders, hooked nose and chin, and tightly drawn lips, the other with his square shoulders, small, tip-tilted nose and baby mouth.

McTavish introduced himself and then introduced us. For a little while, through the first courses of that excellent meal, we were treated to a virtual McTavish monologue. The Inspector would not make conversation, and Amy Renton and I were neither of us free from a certain shyness, difficult to explain. For my part, I was half-afraid that we were about to look and feel a particularly foolish trio, butting in on to a murder case without any valid excuse save a strong curiosity and the accident that we had been the first to find the victim.

As the meal progressed I began to feel, also, that the innocent-looking Ipps had us all carefully weighed in his mental balances. His bland and child-like responses to the conversational approaches of his eccentric host were neither so bland nor so child-like as to deceive one as to the acute intelligence behind those inquiring eyes. His soft, mellow voice had in it, one discovered, a kind of undertone of shrewdness, so that his oft-repeated phrase, "You don't say!" developed on repetition a distinct flavour of ironic amusement, as if he chuckled inwardly not at his own innocence but at that of his interlocutor.

It was not McTavish, but the Inspector, who first introduced the topic which we were all burning to discuss.

"It must have been a great shock for you to find that man . . ." he hazarded, gazing benignantly at Amy Renton, as if he found it incredible that she could possibly have been brought so close to tragedy, as if, indeed, tragedy really existed anywhere in so perfect a world as he with his wondering eyes surveyed.

She shuddered.

"It was. A great shock."

"Yes. It must be horrible seeing a dead man for the first time."

"Must be horrible? But surely, Inspector, you've seen plenty in your time?" I cried.

"Well, a few. Yes, I've seen a few. In fact, I must have seen a great many, one time and another. It's a long time ago since I saw my first. That was a woman. 'Limehouse Loo'. I found her on my beat. All cut about she was. Horrid. I suppose people do these things, but, upon my soul, I sometimes wonder if I've dreamt it all."

" 'Limehouse Loo'. I remember hearing of that case. It was when I was quite a small child," said McTavish. "Did you get the murderer ?"

"Yes, I got him. On my own, too. Gave me my first step. But it wasn't difficult. She was one of three, you know. A crazy doctor had done for them all. He wasn't hard to find. He only died himself last week, oddly enough. Funny how long criminal lunatics live. He was quite a middle-aged man when I took him. I can quite sympathize with the little lady here, because I ran full tilt against the body, unexpectedly. It was propped up in a doorway. Of course, as a constable, one was more or less keyed up to find any queer thing on one's beat. Expectant, rather. The monotony of not finding anything most nights was disappointing. But you, now, were not expecting to find queer things, were you ?"

"I certainly wasn't."

"You might tell me about it. I heard your evidence at the inquest, but I could get a better idea if you told me again, here, quietly, over the coffee-cups."

"Well, I was hurrying along Bishopsgate, when my shoe-strap broke. So I turned into that courtyard place to mend it . . ."

Inspector Ipps shook his head.

"Of course, it must have been your suspender," he said.

The red-headed girl looked blankly at him.

"No girl would turn aside to mend a shoe-strap. And besides, I took the precaution of measuring that doorstep. With your height you'd have chosen the ledge of the steps had it been your shoe, and if you'd been stooping as low as your own shoe you'd never have seen the corpse. The rail base would have cut

off your view. What happened was that you put your foot on the bottom step, just enough to raise your knee a little, and then bent slightly over to do what was necessary." He broke off. "I say, I'm sorry to seem too personal or to embarrass you, but we have to be so careful, even with quite honest witnesses."

"By Gad, you're thorough enough, Inspector!" said McTavish with a touch of admiration in his voice.

"We have to be. In our job, you see, it isn't brilliant deduction or personal ingenuity which counts; it's thoroughness. However, go on. Your suspender broke. You went to the first handy doorstep, out of the main street, to mend it. What next?"

She retold the story. Ipps listened without further interruption. When she had finished he was silent for a moment.

"Just check these facts for me, will you?" he said next. "You are Amy Renton. Your father was John Philip Renton, bank cashier in the Barfield branch of Curtin's Bank, Barfield, Yorkshire. He died two years ago. Your mother was a Miss Amy Hogarth, daughter of William Watson Hogarth, landscape gardener, also of Barfield. You were born in Barfield and educated at Barfield High School. You took a scholarship to Lady Margaret Hall. After that you taught for a term at Barfield Preparatory School. Your father died two years ago; your mother is living with your aunt in Ribbleton, which is ten miles out of Barfield. You have lodgings at 6 Potter's Walk, Chelsea, and have been looking for a post as secretary or librarian for some weeks now. Is that all correct?"

"Everything."

"Where had you been just before you saw the dead man ?"

"I'd been to interview a Mr. Mosowski, in Hounsditch."

"Wholesale sundries for penny bazaars. I know the firm. Why were you so late ?"

"The appointment was originally for six o'clock, when young Mr. Mosowski gets in from his day's travelling, but he 'phoned through and asked me to wait, as he was delayed. I went over to Liverpool Street Station and had some tea for a quarter of an hour. I met him at his warehouse at a quarter to seven."

"Did you get the job ?"

"No. He said he was sorry, but he hadn't wanted a girl of my kind of experience."

"How did you come into touch with him ?"

"The buyer at Garrant's Store told me he thought Mr. Mosowski wanted somebody. I'd been just too late for a job at Garrant's."

"I see. So it was quite by the merest chance that you were in that quarter on that particular night ?"

"The merest chance."

"Are you familiar with Bishopsgate and neighbourhood ?"

"Not at all."

"Why did you come to London for a job ?"

She smiled at him.

"London," was all she said.

"I see. And, of course, teaching's horrid, isn't it ?"

"Deadly."

"Now, Mr. McTavish. By the way, you don't mind

answering my questions, do you? You said in your invitation that you wanted to help . . . "

"Delighted. Shall I tell my story?" He plunged into his account of the incident.

"Thank you. Now let me check your own movements, will you?"

"Certainly."

"Where had you been just before you saw Miss Renton?"

"I was coming from Liverpool Street Station towards Threadneedle Street."

"You had just arrived at the station?"

"Yes."

"From where?"

"Cambridge."

"Having seen there?"

"A host of people. I took tea with the Master of Cardinal's."

"You'd been discussing some academic business?"

"A proposal for a lecture tour."

"I see. I don't think I need ask you to check my particulars of you, Mr. McTavish. I got you from *Who's Who*."

"Yes, I wrote that, of course. One does. They send you in a form. But there's a much better biography of me in a little book published by Laertes Topley, called *Topley's Visiting List*. It's a bit scurrilous, but entertaining, with an amusing caricature by 'High'. I like 'High's' work; it hits home."

Inspector Ipps endured this piece of information with commendable patience, and then turned to me. My own movements were quickly told, for my talk with the Oriental statesman in the offices of the United Bank of Southern Mongolia had lasted an hour and

forty minutes, and had been the sole cause of my visiting that quarter of London. Ipps recited his short account of my parentage, birthplace and career with no errors.

"How long have you been on this case, Inspector ?" asked McTavish.

"Saturday morning."

"It now being Monday evening. Good work. But we weren't hard to track, I suppose ?"

"You were the easiest and Miss Renton the hardest. Once the Force had the names of you two gentlemen, and Mr. Armistead had told them his profession, you were both easy."

The coffee-cups over which the Inspector had wanted us to talk now actually appeared.

"What kind of cigar do you fancy, Inspector ?"

"That's very kind of you, Mr. McTavish, but I don't fancy any kind of cigar. I'd like to roll myself a cigarette."

"But certainly."

The big man took from his pocket a silver tobacco-box and a little book of papers, concentrating for a moment his great, innocent eyes upon them. Once the tobacco was laid along the tissue he returned the box to its pocket with one hand and by what seemed a mere flick of the other rolled himself a twisted cylinder which was a cigarette by courtesy only. He did not lick its edges, but appeared to keep it intact for smoking by virtue of the queer curve which it had. He noticed my wondering gaze.

"Spanish fashion," he explained. " 'The Mexican Ripper' taught it to me when I was bringing him home to be hanged. It's all knack. But it took me five days to acquire it. Now, tell me, had any of

you ever seen the murdered man before that night ?"

It was a beautifully ingenuous question, so spontaneous that the bland eyes hardly seemed to be alert for any sign of hesitancy in our replies. We gave three simultaneous no's.

"We didn't really see him then, you know," added McTavish.

"No, of course, you wouldn't. Well, here he is. He isn't pretty. 'Taken-after-deaths' never are."

He took as he spoke a number of photographs from a pocket-wallet and spread them out before us. They showed the dead man as we had first seen him, forced back over the little deal table, and as we had not seen him, decently composed and laid out. One or two of the prints Ipps, with old-world delicacy, did not spread out, but passed to McTavish and me in a curved hand. They were nude studies.

"You don't know him ? Never seen him ?"

"No."

"And nobody else in the whole of this happy isle seems ever to have seen him, either. I was reading a kind of highbrow novel last week, by a man called Barnaby Brook. I do read novels occasionally. Well, this fellow said a thing that struck me as being one of those true commonplaces. 'Life is never as kind as art.' It's true enough of my job, you know. In detective-stories you always have something in your favour. Either the corpse is found in a country house, with a limited circle of possible assailants, or it turns up in a museum, or a military barracks, or some relatively circumscribed place. Or, if it doesn't, it's the corpse of a well-known person, with plenty of enemies. But here—gee !—an unknown corpse found by three quite innocent people in a place where no corpse should

have been, and carrying no clues to his silly self. I ask you ?"

"Yes, it is rather a pretty problem."

"There you go! 'A pretty problem.' That's a typical phrase from the average detective-story, isn't it ? It isn't a pretty problem ; it's merely a darned nuisance. Finding a needle in a haystack would be a pretty problem. You'd at least know where to look and for what you were looking. The essential of a problem is that it can be stated. How can you state this one ?

"Who was he ? Whence did he come ? Who killed him ? Why was he killed ?

"Four separate and distinct propositions. One would answer another, of course."

"I suppose, Inspector," said McTavish, now giving his promised impression of "a mildly academic cove shocked a little by being brought up against a real-life tragedy" and leaning forward over the table, "I suppose this means that the death of that man will remain one of the undiscovered mysteries ?"

"I don't think so, Mr. McTavish. I'm not a very clever fellow, but I have luck at times, quite astonishing luck."

"Well, I must confess that I envy you your task, bringing the criminals to justice by sheer energy and detective efficiency with such a poor jumping-off place. I only wish we could help."

Inspector Ipps looked keenly at him.

"Well, I have heard that two heads are better than one, so four heads might be better than two. Why shouldn't you help ?"

"Oh, I thought the official police didn't like amateurs nosing about. . . ."

"We don't. But we're always glad of a little help, you know. Help from one who knows so much about the crime as you know, Mr. McTavish, should be particularly worth having."

"Oh, I know nothing about it."

"I wonder ?" said the Inspector.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THERE was a moment of pregnant silence. I felt that Ipps was not convinced of the bona fides of McTavish, but that seemed ridiculous. It was, perhaps, that the Inspector thought we were keeping something back from him as to the circumstances of our finding the murdered man.

"Well, whatever you do or do not know, I'll tell you what *I* know," Ipps resumed. "The man was strangled by no human hand."

I was again the victim of a feeling of mental uneasiness. Could this large, innocent-looking police official be asking us to believe that some demoniac agency had caused the death of the unknown man? Was he, after his kind, seeking to excuse himself for some failure to discover immediately the secret of the murder, daring now to suggest that it was not discoverable because it was supernatural? I had been long enough in China to know what superstitions can be harboured in the minds of white men who are apparently sane and rational enough in all other regards. Ipps might conceivably believe that if no devil from hell had choked the life out of the dead man, the very hand of God had closed upon him.

I remembered the terrible metaphor of the Third Psalm, which must have lurked in my subconscious

mind from my boyhood. "Thou hast smitten mine enemies upon the cheekbone, Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. . . ."

Amy Renton, I think, shared my chaotic thought, but McTavish was firmly placed upon a rational base.

"No human hand? What then? An ape—like that story in Poe?"

Inspector Ipps shook his head.

"No. A machine."

"Come, come, Inspector, you can't expect us to believe that some monstrous Robot walked through one of the most crowded streets of the City of London, entered the basement of a building containing a popular tea rooms, lured a man into a disused room, and then strangled the life out of him."

"I expect you to believe nothing. All I said was that no human hand strangled the man. Look here."

He extracted from his bundle of photographic prints an enlargement of the dead man's throat, showing all the marks upon it.

"This photograph doesn't show quite what you ought to see. But it shows enough. If you were choked by my thumbs and fingers your throat would show indents and bruises. It might, and probably would, show a few minute punctures if my nails were long enough to pierce the skin. But what does this show? It shows positive lacerations of the flesh in addition to the compression necessary to choke the man. In other words, it shows that the man was garrotted by some instrument."

McTavish gave a long, slow whistle.

"I wonder. Wouldn't claws have made such marks?"

"Claws? I hardly think so."

"Mailed gloves ?"

"Mailed gloves ?"

"Yes. The things knights and men-at-arms used to wear. The things that decorate the effigies in armour at the Tower and in country houses and in antique-shops."

"No. Those surely are leathern gauntlets with metal-facings over the back of the hand and the backs of the fingers. The facings don't protrude far enough to have scraped the flesh like this. They might protrude far enough to show deep indentations where the finger-tips pressed home. . . ."

"Then you add another conundrum to our four separate and distinct propositions of a moment ago. How was he killed ?"

"I do. And it's a tough one. Surely if there were a garrotting machine somebody would have seen somebody lugging it either into or out of the building ? If there were a man in mailed gloves, or carrying such bulky things, somebody would have noted him. If it were an assailant with claws, he or it could not have escaped notice."

"The machine or the gloves might have been brought in a bag. The assailant might have been some small creature carried in a box and released at the victim."

Inspector Ipps shook his head.

"It was a dusty room. There was no sign of a bag or a box having been rested on the table or the floor."

"A dusty room ? What about footprints ?"

"Plenty of those. The caretaker's men had been in, shifting most of the old furniture and piling those packing-cases in the corners. Too much disturbance of footprints to give us any clue."

"Then how can you be so sure about a bag or a box ?"

"Why, because that would have been about the most recent thing in the room. It would have left a distinctive mark. Don't suppose that the place was carpeted with a thick layer of dust, taking a firm impression of everything. It wasn't. It was only very dusty. We couldn't really be sure, for example, which footprints overlaid which. The dead man's feet were distinctive enough."

"Yes, I know. He wore very pointed toes."

"Exactly."

"Then what is to be your next step ?"

"I must wait for all the reports to come in. The photographs are almost bound to bring some replies from somebody or another. As a rule the response to a circulated photograph and description is a mass of false suppositions that such a man has been seen, and the right information. That's where the Yard has it over these novelists' detectives. We have an organization for gathering, examining and sifting such information. Incidentally, I've put men on to the cloak-rooms at Liverpool Street and the two nearest underground stations."

"Whatever for ?"

"Just in case there was a bag or a box concerned in the affair—a bag or a box which didn't go as far as that basement. We're interrogating the clerks and all porters. We haven't much hope in that quarter, though."

"Well, your information seems to me to make the task of finding the murderer easier."

"How so ?"

"I was explaining to my friends the importance of

motive and means in tracking down criminals. Here, apparently, a very unusual means has been employed."

"It may have been a very usual means used in an unusual way."

"I don't quite follow that."

"Suppose they got this fellow with his head between the gates of an electric lift and choked the life out of him that way—and then brought the corpse to that basement."

"But its posture—the bruise on its back ?"

"The posture wouldn't be very different if a dead man were flung heavily over a table from the posture if he'd been alive. That might explain the bruise, too. Or it might have been caused by his being forced against the lift-shaft. Or, again, suppose they grappled him with the serrated cup of a swinging crane—down by the riverside somewhere—and brought him in dead ?"

"But, Inspector, surely the job of carrying a dead man to that room would be much more terrible than the job of killing him there ?" I said.

"Yes, I know it would. But I was merely exploring Mr. McTavish's suggestion as to what means had been used to kill him. I haven't, myself, the slightest doubt that the murder actually took place in that room. We've examined all the occupants of the building. None of them can throw any light on the mysterious man. The people in the tearooms are prepared to swear that they served no such customer. It's that tearooms which makes the thing rather more awkward. In an ordinary suite of offices somebody might be expected to note the passing in of a stranger who failed to pass out again. There would be a porter, or a head-messenger, or a housekeeper, or someone

who would notice a stranger. But with a tearooms, of course, there's a steady dribble of men at all hours of the day, and at some times there is a perfect stream."

"You don't think he was killed early on, do you?"

"The doctor says not. But, remember, you can't always be guided by *rigor mortis*. It is possible—although, I admit, not probable—that he was killed during a busy time of the day and simply left there. The odds against anyone going into or peering through the windows of that basement room were enormous. Even Miss Renton had adopted an unusual posture before she caught a glimpse of him."

"If she hadn't, when would he have been found? I mean when would anyone normally have entered the room?"

"It is difficult to say. You see, no cleaners are being paid to look after it while it is tenantless. Probably the next entry would have been by some prospective occupier. And how few people would want to take one room on the basement floor?"

"Who were the previous occupants?"

"No, there's nothing helpful there. It was a depot of the Central London Parcels Delivery Services. The room was used for nothing but the collection of parcels. They found it didn't pay its keep as a collection depot, so they closed it down. Prior to that, the tearoom people had it. They also found it wasn't paying. Between the parcels people vacating it and your finding the body there, the caretaker had used it for storing a few old packing-cases, as you saw."

"What about the caretaker?"

"He's an ex-sergeant of artillery. Lives with his wife on the top floor of the next building. They have

the three old houses in their charge. There appears nothing to implicate him. He says he wasn't even in that building between ten that morning and when they sent for him to question him."

"Still—one never knows, does one ?"

"No, one never knows."

The large, innocent-looking man again took out his box of tobacco and rolled himself a curved cigarette.

"All we can do now," he remarked, "is to await the reports. If you like, as you're so interested, I'll let you know what's in 'em."

"Splendid ! I suppose there'd be no objection to our having a look at that basement room ?"

"Objection ? There can't be any. It isn't our room. Anybody who wants to see it can do so. The owners have still to let it, you know. They aren't any too pleased about this business. You'd think that the morbid curiosity which brings crowds to the scene of the murder would cause some morbid fellow to hire the room, wouldn't you ? It never does. Well, I must be getting along. Thanks very much for a pleasant meal, Mr. McTavish."

"Not at all, Inspector. Won't you come round to my rooms and have a spot of whisky ?"

"No, thank you. I must be getting home. I have a job of work to do."

"What ! Not another murder case ?"

The big man blushed like any girl.

"No ; only a little hobby of mine."

"Hello, Inspector. You seem a bit ashamed of that hobby. What is it ? We all have our hobbies, you know."

"I know. But mine happens to be a particularly foolish one." He seemed to give way to a sudden

burst of confidence as he looked at McTavish's friendly face. "I make dolls."

"Dolls ?" said Amy Renton.

"Yes. Sounds odd, doesn't it ? But they're not really ordinary dolls. They're puppets. Marionettes, you know. You must come up some time and see them. You'd be surprised what a lot of pleasure and artistic satisfaction you get from a puppet show of your own. I fancy I have as good a puppet theatre as any amateur in London. I find puppets very comforting after human beings. They're so blameless and docile. Even the wicked ones are attractive—like Mr. Punch."

"Poor Mr. Punch !" said Amy. "I'm always so sorry for him. Do you condescend to Punch and Judy ?"

"It's my favourite," said Ipps, struggling into his coat. "You see, Mr. Punch is the one man of my criminal acquaintance who gets the better of Jack Ketch, the hangsman. Good night, Mr. McTavish, and many thanks."

He shook hands with us all and departed, McTavish holding the door for him and bowing.

"There goes an able man," he said, as he returned to the table and poured out a last cup of coffee from the coffee-maker which stood there. "A very able man. I wonder if Mr. Punch always escapes from Jack Ketch, the hangsman, when he conducts the mime ?"

CHAPTER NINE

It was about eleven o'clock the following morning when McTavish and I went to inspect the room in which the dead man had been found. We had arranged to meet Amy Renton for luncheon later in the morning, McTavish having instructed her to gather for him a list of all the ships berthing in the pool of London or the Tilbury docks on the day of the murder.

My queer friend was thoroughly enjoying his self-ordained task as a detective. He insisted upon our taking coffee in the little tearooms before approaching the caretaker of the three buildings for admission to the basement.

"The City Tea and Luncheon Rooms" hardly lived up to its title. It consisted only of the two back rooms on the basement floor, with, possibly, some kind of kitchen attached. The rooms were not very big and were furnished with plain wooden tables, a number of straight-backed chairs and a few basket chairs uphostered with shabby, blue chintz cushions. The place was obviously used by the poorer class of City clerks and typists. Whatever luncheons were provided would, no doubt, be those scratch meals comprising meat pies, or poached eggs, or tinned beans on toast. Mid-morning coffee and afternoon cups of tea seemed to be the speciality of the place, and when we entered

most of the tables were occupied by little groups of young men, with here and there a couple of City girls. There were no games being played, and no provision for games, the chess-boards and domino-boxes of the usual City tearooms being absent. I wondered how such a place could possibly compete with the Lyons and Mecca cafés which surrounded it in such profusion.

"Do you think such a place as this is subsidized?" I asked McTavish, as we found a vacant table and drew up our chairs.

"Subsidized? By whom? From what motive?"

"I don't know or guess by whom, but I could suggest many motives."

"As a *maison de convenance*? Or a gang's rallying-place? No, no, my dear Armistead. You are far too romantic. And why should it be subsidized?"

"Can such a place possibly pay?"

"Pay! My dear fellow! A little gold-mine. The rent for two such basement rooms won't be very high, and think of the profit. Coffee at tuppence or thrippence a cup which costs only that for a small urn full. Cakes at tuppence which show fifty per cent profit. Poached eggs on toast at a shilling or more that cost only about ninepence, or less, the way these people buy eggs. Oh, yes, it will pay well enough. The overhead charges are small and all the service will be performed by the proprietor and her partner, or with only one assistant. The turnover here will be larger than you think in the nine hours or so they keep open. Here comes one of the acolytes."

A pleasant-faced girl of about twenty-three came towards us. She wore no apron or uniform, but was quietly dressed in a green frock of sorts. McTavish

gave her his most endearing smile, the grotesque face changing under its light, and asked for two coffees. I expected him to talk to her, but he did not.

"We'll gossip with her when she brings them," he said, as if he read my thought. "They talk better when the order's off their minds. Don't let her suspect we have any real interest in the murder. Here she comes."

The girl laid down her tray and served our coffee, with a remark about the weather.

"Do you know a firm called Taverner and Jones in this part of the world ?" asked McTavish.

"No. What are they ?"

"Chartered accountants."

"No, I've never heard of them."

"Oh, we'll find 'em. The nearest policeman will perhaps know. Talking of policemen, I suppose you had 'em swarming all over the place since that dead body was found ?"

"Yes. It's been good for trade, so far. There have been crowds hanging about, and some of them have dropped in here. But I'm afraid it'll do us harm in the long run. Once the excitement has died down, people won't like using a café so near to such a gruesome room."

"Oh, I don't know. People have short memories. Did you know the dead man well ?"

"No. We'd never seen him. He was quite a stranger, I believe."

"Don't you get many strangers in ?"

"Not many. Most of our customers are regulars."

"People from neighbouring offices, I suppose, and a few foreigners ?"

"Yes. Not many foreigners, though."

"Really? Now I should have thought that Bishopsgate would be full of foreigners."

"It is, but they are generally well-to-do foreigners, and don't come to places like these. We have a few regular customers who are foreigners. There's Mr. Kaunitz and Mr. de Vega."

"Kaunitz is an Austrian, I suppose; and de Vega will be a Spaniard?"

"Yes. Do you know them?"

McTavish shook his head.

"No; I was only judging by the names. Have you any Italians or Chinese customers?"

"I don't think we have any Italians. We certainly haven't any Chinese."

"Now I should have thought you might have had, with so many Chinese banks about."

"Oh, no. They wouldn't come down here. They'd go to a Chinese restaurant, or to one of the better places." She laughed pleasantly. "This is a very unassuming place, you know."

Another customer caught her eye and she drifted off.

"I wonder if that poor devil were Austrian or Spanish," said McTavish, "and if Mr. Kaunitz or Mr. de Vega was the decoy duck?"

"It's hardly likely, is it?" I asked.

"My dear Armistead, anything is likely. I wish we'd been allowed to look at that room when 'Amy found the man. By now there will be nothing left to tell us anything. You know, I don't think we need trouble the caretaker for permission to view. When we've finished this very English and amateurish coffee we'll just drift out that way and look in in all innocent curiosity."

"The sooner the better then."

I gulped my coffee down, but he took his time, looking round the room at the various groups of customers, his odd, benignant face infused with a kind of mild interest in his fellow-men. When at length he had finished, and had paid the bill, we moved out into the corridor and, instead of mounting the few stairs to the street-level, turned, and found ourselves outside the fateful room.

To my slight surprise, there was no one on guard, nor was the door fastened. We entered, and found ourselves looking out of the window through which a few nights before we had looked in. Since the discovery of the body the room, in McTavish's phrase, had obviously been swept and garnished. The table over which the dead man had been flung had been drawn against one of the side walls and the broken packing-cases cleared.

"Nothing at all, not a thing, not a clue," said my companion. "I wonder what the official police found? That stout fellow, Ipps, was very close really, for all his affectation of friendship. It's odd, don't you think, that they've kept no one on guard here? They say, you know, that a murderer always returns to the scene of his crime, if you give him time enough. I often think, too, that he would make an effort to get to the inquest on his victim. If I were in charge of a case like this I certainly wouldn't neglect to have the scene of the discovery watched night and day until the murderer were apprehended, or until all hope of taking him had been given up."

"Nor would I, Mr. McTavish," said a voice behind us from the doorway.

We whipped round, like children startled at the jam-cupboard. Inspector Ipps was leaning negligently

against the lintel, surveying us with that innocent gaze of his. I don't know what McTavish felt at that moment, but I felt as guilty as if I had actually committed the murder myself.

Inspector Ipps advanced into the room.

"You see," he said, as if he were explaining some rudimentary fact to a pair of rather stupid pupils, "the great art of detection is to watch without being obtrusive, to wait without being impatient, and to strike without being impulsive."

"I see," said McTavish.

CHAPTER TEN

"I'm glad you came here this morning," continued Ipps, after he had shaken hands with us, "for we've had a reply to our broadcast portrait query. The man was a Cuban."

"Ah!" said McTavish, with a sage wagging of his head to me.

"That eases things enormously, doesn't it?" said Ipps.

"It certainly does," said McTavish.

"I'm afraid I don't——"

"Come, come, Armistead. Don't overdo the stupid Watson rôle. Cuba, my dear fellow, Cuba."

"Yes, but——"

"The land of the garrotting machine."

"The garrotting machine?"

"Instead of the gallows, or the electric chair. They don't use it now, but they did."

"Oh, you think somebody from Cuba used the machine on this man?"

"Not *the* machine. It's as big as an iron armchair. But *a* machine. In short, they garrotted him. That seems, Inspector, to indicate a motive."

"It does."

"Revenge. And a special kind of revenge. Cock Robin had caused somebody to be garrotted, and somebody's friends have very faithfully garrotted

Cock Robin. But we're still a long way from knowing the identity of Mr. Sparrow and Company. We can't very well search every Cuban in London for a pocket garrotting machine."

Inspector Ipps shook his head.

"No, we can't do that. But now we have some kind of line on the fellow, we can search out his English associates, if he has any."

"What did the report say? From whom have you had it?"

"The purser of the ship which brought him. He hadn't been in London more than twelve hours, it seems. He came on a tramp-steamer from Havana."

"And his name?"

"He was entered on the ship's books as Dupuy Canalejas."

"Did anyone meet him? Did he say to whom he was going when he left the ship?"

"Nobody met him and he said nothing of his movements. He apparently came into Bishopsgate to cash a draft."

"On which bank?"

"The European and South American."

"Do they know nothing of him?"

"Nothing at all. They were advised that he would present and cash the draft. All they asked of him was his proof of identification and signature."

"Then he had money on him when he was killed?"

"No."

"I mean when he was killed, not when his body was found."

"I know you mean that. The answer is still 'No'."

"Then what had he done with the cash he drew on his draft?"

"He had done what any normal man would have done. He had opened a current account with the bank on which he drew it."

"So he intended to remain in London some time ?"

"That seems a fair inference."

"What address did he give ?"

"Lamberton's Hotel. He said that he would communicate when he had settled a residence."

"He was a foreigner. Had he registered himself as an alien ?"

"No. He seems to have gone from the ship to his hotel, spent a few hours looking about London, gone to the bank and made his arrangements there, had a meal, walked into this room, and met his death."

"Strange, very strange. He was doubtless dogged from the moment he landed."

"That would seem likely. There is, of course, another possibility."

"What ? That he was recognized unexpectedly ?"

"Yes. And yet another possibility. That someone drew him into conversation over the meal and took advantage of a sudden opportunity."

"Where did he have that meal ? Obviously it was somewhere within easy reach of the bank and this room."

"I have a man canvassing all the neighbouring eating-houses with the photographs."

"He came with no good purpose ?"

"Oh, one doesn't know. You think he came for some blackmailing end ? I thought that, too. And the proposed victim was too quick and too violent for him. But it's only a guess."

"I know. But I have medals for successful guessing."

"He may have come over on some quite legitimate

business: to buy tobacco, or to sell tobacco, or for some similar purpose."

"True. What was the ship?"

"The *Castle of Cuba*. I shouldn't worry about the ship if I were you. We're doing the necessary interrogations there. The ship won't help us, I fear. The restaurant where he dined may."

"Supposing you draw blank at these eating-houses?"

"Then we must assume that he was taken by someone to a private residence."

"How do you know," I interjected, "that he had had a meal at all?"

Inspector Ipps looked at me for a second.

"Condition of stomach. Post-mortem," was all he said.

"Then we are again at a standstill until we have your man's report as to where this fellow ate."

"That's about the size of it."

"I'll tell you what, Inspector. I wouldn't mind wagering all England to an apple-pip that we have another of these garrotting murders before we find the murderer."

"Do you think so? Why, might I ask?"

"I do think so. It's inconceivable that this visiting Cuban was lured in here and outed in that unusual way merely as a casual piece of revenge. Whoever did for him will either be done for or will find it necessary to do for somebody else as well."

"It's quite likely, unless, of course, all we've struck is the fag-end of a long drama which has been played out in Cuba itself. I mean this fellow—Cock Robin, as you call him—may be the last victim of the vendetta. He may have come here to make a getaway and been followed or trapped."

"That, I assume, is what will be interesting on the ship that brought him. It may have brought his assassin."

"Exactly."

McTavish turned to me.

"Well, Armistead, there's nothing more we can do here. We'd better be moving on to meet Amy. You'll let us know, won't you, Inspector, if you learn anything more? You know how keen we are to be in the hunt."

"I'll certainly keep in touch with you, I promise that," said Inspector Ipps. "Of course, there'll be a lot of dull routine work now. We shall have to draw the Cuban diplomatic people, and all firms having trading relationships with Cuba and South America generally. Some of them must have some kind of knowledge of the dead man, one would imagine. That's what takes the romance out of our trade, you know. In the story-books the routine work is all glossed over. Somebody now has to fill in a few days about as unromantically as a commercial traveller making calls. The traveller will produce his samples and talk. Our man will produce his photographs and talk. In either case it's odds against any result from the call."

"Ah! But think of the thrill when somebody says 'Yes'."

"Yes, there is that. Well, good morning."

"You're not coming our way, by any chance?"

"No. I have a little work to do here. As I overheard you saying to Mr. Armistead, this place has to be watched for a bit yet."

McTavish crossed over to the side of the Inspector.

"What about this fellow de Vega?"

"You mean the man who takes his coffee next door? We've checked him up. He seems all right. He is employed as London agent by a Spanish merchanting house. He seems a very blameless fellow. His habits are as regular as the clock. His hobby isn't garrotting; it is working for the Catholic Truth Society."

"I suppose," I said, with a sudden idea, "there is no suspicion of any religious motive behind this murder?"

Ipps shook his large head.

"Not as yet. There may be, of course, but it's very unlikely. There isn't that persecuting flame behind religion nowadays. A religious murder is as remote from the nineteen-twenties as a religious war."

"Which isn't saying much," interjected McTavish, "for, after all, the last war was really between a Catholic and a pagan culture."

"Ah, there you get a bit beyond me. I'm no scholar of either religious cultures or the origins of the War. No; I fancy whatever the motive was behind this killing, it was more or less personal."

Inspector Ipps put his hands behind his back and walked over to the window, where he stood looking up into the street. We left the room and passed out of the building. As we emerged from its front door I waved a hand to the watching figure below, but he made no response.

McTavish repeated his words of the previous evening.

"An able man, that; very able. I wouldn't like to have that man on *my* tracks, Armistead. They call him Innocent Ipps in the Force. There was another Innocent in history who belied his name, you know.

Do you know anything about ecclesiastical history ?"

"Very little."

"Ah ! Then you won't know much about Innocent the Third."

"Nothing at all, except that he was a pope and I seem to remember seeing a portrait of him somewhere."

McTavish groaned.

"And to think that men like you are running contemporary British civilization and colonizing the ends of the earth ! Well, Innocent was a remarkably strong character. He put down heresy with a flail. It was he who ordered the extermination, with great cruelty, of the Albigenses. It was he who first asserted the Pope's right to grant benefices and to depose bishops."

"Very interesting. But what has this to do with the murder of this Cuban ?"

"Nothing, my dear fellow. Nothing at all. I was only remarking that Innocent Ipps wasn't the only Innocent who belied his name. And yet, somehow, I don't think he'll discover the murderer of the Cuban. If anybody discovers that, it won't be Innocent Ipps."

"I see. You think it will be wise McTavish ?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised. I have, at least, a theory."

"You mean this idea of revenge ?"

"There must, you know, be some very good reason for garrotting a man when you could kill him in so many easier ways. When we discover that reason we shall have gone far to discovering the murderer. Who was it that taught Ipps how to roll his cigarettes Spanish fashion ?"

"Didn't he say it was 'The Mexican Ripper', or somebody like that ?"

"He did. 'The Mexican Ripper' taught him how to roll cigarettes. I wonder what he'll learn from the Cuban garrotter? I wonder if he's telling us all they know at the Yard?"

"Why? What do you suspect?"

"Nothing, really. But it is rather a coincidence, surely, that Ipps, who spent his early career as a detective in touch with North and South America, should find himself put on to what looks like a casual and mysterious murder in the heart of London but in which the victim is afterwards discovered to be a South American."

"I suppose he just happened to be available."

"Yes, perhaps that was it. But I think I must spend part of my afternoon drawing, as he calls it, the Cuban diplomats."

He stopped and glanced into a shop window for a moment or two.

"I thought so, Armistead. They've put a man on to us. We're being shadowed. The excellent Ipps doesn't really trust us."

"What! Do you mean he suspects one of us of having——"

"Not a bit of it. But he's jealous of anything we may discover. Unless . . ." He gave a long, low whistle.

"Unless what?"

"Unless I'm doing the Innocent an injustice, and the man following us is one of the Cuban gang. By gad, Armistead, that's possible. I think we'd better increase the depth of our collars by an extra half-inch and have 'em double-starched, in case they gratify their passion for garrotting on us. After all, we discovered the fellow, and we've been fools enough to show more

interest in the affair than is warranted by our having been witnesses at the inquest. Don't look back. Don't suggest that we know we have a shadow. And, whatever you do, don't tell that girl, or you'll frighten the wits out of her. Come on. When we reach the restaurant our friend will probably disclose himself. Right, slow march. This is beginning to grow interesting. Here we have all the excitement of being shadowed like criminals with all the moral glow of being on the side of justice. We should have good appetites for our lunch."

"Why ?"

"Why ! Because it may be our last." He gave a sardonic chuckle. "When *we* are found garrotted late this afternoon they'll examine the condition of *our* stomachs and deduce that we had a meal somewhere."

But my own stomach had developed a sinking in its pit too strong to allow me to enjoy his grim jesting.

"Don't be absurd," I said. "I don't believe we are being followed. How on earth can you tell in a crowded street like this ?"

"Because, much as I believe in coincidences, I don't believe that coincidence explains why the same man should have been hanging about Darchester Square when we left it this morning, and lolling about the entrance to that courtyard when we left Ipps in the basement, and be slowly walking the same way that we have taken, and have stopped suddenly to look into a tobacco-shop window when I stopped abruptly to look into the print-shop a moment ago. No, believe it or not, Armistead, we've started something. They've put the hounds on us. The only question is whether they come from the official kennels at Scotland Yard or whether they are leashed from the

Cuban pack. Hello! Here's little Amy waiting at the door for us. Well, my dear, I'm afraid your morning has been wasted. Ipps has already discovered what ship brought him."

"Has he? That's good. But, Mr. McTavish . . ."

"Yes?"

"I've been followed all morning. The man is over there now, pretending to read those notices on that church door."

McTavish looked at me with whimsical triumph.

"Ah, my dear, an attractive creature like you can expect to be followed. Wait until they begin to follow such ugly brutes as Armistead and me. That'll be the time to worry. And now come and eat. You must be famished."

"But, Mr. McTavish——"

"All right, my dear. You may be sure that he won't follow you in here. If he does, you must go up to him and tell him what I told you when we took each other on."

"What was that?"

"No followers allowed."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

O. SWETE MCTAVISH seemed to enjoy, like some schoolboy, the business of baffling the shadowers after we had had our meal. He sent the waiter out for a taxi, into which the three of us bundled ourselves hastily. The man had been instructed to drive us to the Monument Station of the Underground Railway. There we entered from the King William Street entrance, but, instead of taking train, dashed across and emerged again into Monument Street from the second exit. A second taxi took us back to Liverpool Street, where we entered another Underground Station and took train for Baker Street. There we emerged to ground-level.

"Well," said McTavish, "I think you and Amy might pop into Madame Tussaud's and look at the waxworks. I'm going to be busy. We'll meet at the mews as near to five o'clock as we can make it."

I wondered if he had some special purpose in mind.

"Are you serious about the waxworks?" I rather fatuously asked.

"Oh, no. You can go to the movies instead if you like, or spend a thrilling hour or two in the beetle-room of the British Museum. All I mean is that I am going to leave you to your own devices. Only I

wouldn't, if I were you, desert the more crowded resorts. Keep away from basements and tearooms that are below stairs. Good-bye, my children."

He waved a hand to us and strode off. We watched him clamber into another taxi-cab.

"What a queer man he is!" I said.

"Yes, I suppose he is. But I like him," said Amy Renton. "You don't think, do you, that he is pretending to be a detective just to provide me with a job?"

"Not he. He's thoroughly enjoying himself. Well, what *shall* we do?"

"Why not go to the movies? I'm very fond of them."

We walked a few yards to the nearest cinematograph theatre, where I procured a couple of seats well to the back of the floor. If amateur sleuthing involved taking a pretty girl to cinema matinees, I was quite prepared to consider resigning altogether from my post with the Chinese Customs authority and becoming a permanent sleuth. For a while Amy Renton chattered away in undertones, but when the main feature-picture was flashed on to the screen she fell silent. I must confess that I found the film arresting enough. It was one of those quite characteristic American melodramas about life in the frozen wilds of the North, the actual plot of which I have long ago forgotten. I only know that I saw the heroine eventually rescued by a super-canine dog and united to the hero, who had been drummed out of the "North-West Mounteds" on a false charge, while the villain and his friends were sent skywards by the premature explosion of a blasting charge which they had laid for the destruction of their own enemies.

I turned to my companion with some trite remark as the lights went up. To my consternation she was no longer at my side.

To have left her seat she must have worked her way along the whole row, for I occupied the gangway-seat at my end. Interested as I had been in the film, it would have been quite possible for me not to have noticed her movements, and as it was still early in the afternoon there were few other people between her and the other gangway.

I sat still for a moment. It was quite likely, I told myself, that she had slipped out for some very ordinary reason and would as quietly return. In any event, I did not want to make a fuss or to start inquiries in any agitated fashion. The lights were beginning to fade out before the next picture. I slipped from my own seat and stationed myself behind the barrier at the back of the hall. From there I could watch all the entrance gangways and keep my eyes on the two seats we had vacated.

It was impossible to suppose that the Cubans, if they were Cubans, had seized the girl from my side without noise. It was equally impossible that they could have decoyed her, for I would have heard a whisper from the back, and there had been no occupant in the next seat to her. Where, then, had she gone? It was very unlikely that she would have slipped away to some retiring room without any word to me, knowing in what state of expectancy our nerves were after our experience of being shadowed that morning.

The film was now under way, and was evoking guffaws from the audience about me, but I saw nothing. I was trying to think out my best plan.

My trouble was unnecessary. No plan was needed.

There was a touch at my elbow, and Amy's voice whispered in my ear.

"The flicker made my eyes ache. I just slipped out for a moment or two. Did I worry you? I'm so sorry."

I was too relieved to confess my momentary agitation.

"Shall we sit it out?" she next asked.

The place had got on my own nerves now.

"No. Let us clear out and look at the shops or something."

We passed into the hall.

As we went down the three broad stone steps which led us to the pavement an attendant came hurrying after us.

"Excuse me, miss. Did you leave these in the telephone-box?"

He was holding out a pair of long gloves. For a moment I thought she was about to take them from him, but she shook her head.

"No. It must have been somebody else. I haven't used the telephone-box."

"But . . ." began the man. His sentence remained unfinished, for, with a guiding hand on my arm, Amy had begun to lead me down the last of the three steps.

She was, I noticed, quite palpably agitated.

"That seemed like a trap. They wanted to get me away from you. They must have seen me as I stood in the hall a few moments ago. They really are after us, then, Mr. Armistead!"

"Oh, no," I assured her. "It must have been quite a genuine mistake. Someone else had left the gloves, and the man, having seen you standing in the hall, thought it was you."

"But I hadn't used the telephone-box. Why should I ?"

If she knew of no reason, I knew of none. It seemed to me to be one of those quite common incidents which occur in popular places of amusement, where people carelessly leave their minor possessions about and attendants are eager to earn a tip for their restoration.

"Let us take a bus home," she said.

"Home ? What, to the mews ? Yes, let's. And you shall make me some tea while we wait for McTavish."

"Do you know," she said, "I fancy he'll be later than he thought."

CHAPTER TWELVE

AMY'S expectation that McTavish would be delayed was falsified. It was striking five when the door opened and he entered.

"Did you go to the Cuban Legation ?" she asked.

"The Legation ! Good heavens, no ! Why should I go to the Cuban Legation ?"

"I thought you said you were going to 'draw the diplomatic fellows'."

"So I was. So I have."

She looked at him with a puzzled frown wrinkling her brows.

"My child, when you are as old as I am you will realize that the last place at which to 'draw' diplomatists is at their embassies and legations. There they are full of official caution."

"Then where—— ?"

"The club, my dear. The club is the place where the diplomatic oyster can be opened with the least trouble."

"But," said I, "how did you know which club the Cuban Minister frequents ?"

"Armistead, you are as ingenuous as she is. The Minister ! I didn't dream of worrying the Minister, or his First Secretary. I went for the Commercial Attaché. I discovered his club by the simple process

of asking someone. When one doesn't know a thing, it is always best to ask somebody, don't you think ?"

Had his grotesque face not been adorned with a whimsical smile of great charm, I should, I think, have lost my temper with his air of half-playful patronage.

He took from a hook on the wall a long porcelain pipe, such as German students affect, clapped a red fez on his head, flung himself down on a low Chesterfield couch, and sighed luxuriously.

"The Tsar in his home ! Minion, make me some tea. I see you've already had some."

"We're quite ready for more," said the Minion.

"Yes, Armistead, I rang up the Legation, asked the telephonist where the Commercial Attaché had gone for lunch, and the attendant obligingly told me. A man of my age and background knows somebody in nearly every club. This club stumped me. It was—what do you think ?"

"Some Latin-American show, I suppose."

"No such luck. That would have been simple. No. This fine fellow was taking his luncheon at the Royal Fisticuffs. The Royal Fisticuffs was founded by George IV and his Corinthians, and is about as exclusive as any club in Town. It has long since ceased, I may say, to take any interest in fisticuffs as a science. It is composed mainly of racing men and a few politicians. I don't know a soul in it—or, at least, I didn't until to-day."

"What did you do ?"

"I took the line of least resistance. I asked for the Commercial Attaché. When he came down I told him who and what I was and what I wanted. He was most amazingly decent. We had quite a long talk. . . ."

He was lighting his absurd pipe now, and Amy was bustling about re-laying the tea things. There was about the room a pleasant savour of domesticity.

McTavish had furnished his disused mews in a somewhat haphazard fashion. His determination to live on what he might earn instead of upon his inherited income was reflected in his furniture. There was, for example, a plain deal table, which he must, in some phase of poverty, have picked up for a couple of shillings or so, in one corner, but on the wall above it was a small etching that, even to my untutored eye, spelled guineas. One wall of the room was shelved for books, and housed his library of technical volumes on economics. Other books, of a most erratic variety, were scattered about the room, piled up in corners and on chairs. A small standing bookcase of most beautiful workmanship and some antiquity was devoted to detective novels, his own three or four volumes adorning the upper shelves. Over the mantel were hung several photographs, including one or two under-graduate groups. The chairs were a very mixed lot, bought, one assumed, when opportunity and the vagaries of his purse had permitted. There had been no effort to make the room tasteful, but it reflected a man of taste. There had been no conscious effort to make it homely, but it bespoke an old-fashioned homely comfort.

"Did you discover anything about the dead man?"

"Nothing at all. The Legation knows nothing about him."

"How did you manage about his description? It is difficult to convey by words an adequte idea of a man, surely?"

"Very difficult. So I took the precaution of snooping

one of Ipps's precious photographs. No, I am convinced that we shall get no help from the Legation. I had a vague idea at first that probably there might be some political significance about the man's death, but that seems remote, really."

"What did you do after you'd left the Attaché?" asked Amy Renton.

McTavish took the cup of tea which she was holding out to him and helped himself to thin bread-and-butter, laying aside his student's pipe.

"Oh, I amused myself, you know. I looked into a few bookshops in Charing Cross Road, called in at one or two places."

"What kind of places?"

Her tone was very casual, but I felt somehow that she was firmly insistent.

"Oh, tobacconists and people, you know."

He, too, was serenely casual.

"It's a very lazy job," he added, "this sleuthing business. Even Ipps must find it a lazy business."

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, I came home on top of a bus, and outside the Cuban Legation stood Ipps and another man, and, do you know, Amy, I fancy they must have been there all afternoon. I wonder if they were waiting for somebody?"

She was refilling the teapot with hot water as he spoke, and the spout of the little kettle for a split second rattled on the edge of the earthenware.

"Perhaps they were," she said.

"I wonder who it can possibly have been?" asked McTavish, with an intonation and a look as innocent as that of Ipps himself.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

McTavish was attended in his disused mews by an old woman who came daily at eight o'clock to tidy the rooms and make the breakfast. His other meals, until the advent of Amy Renton, he had, apparently, prepared for himself or taken elsewhere.

The following morning I awoke to find the table laid for two and the old dame pottering about the sitting-room.

"Mr. McTavish is out, sir," she said as I saluted her with the formal "good morning".

"Oh ! Has he left a message ?"

"No, sir. But his room is empty, and his boots aren't here. I've never known him to be out so early before. He must have something on his mind."

"Well, I won't wait for him. He'll probably be back any moment. I didn't hear him get up, but, then, I sleep very soundly."

I drew up a chair and leaned over for the two newspapers which were by McTavish's plate. He took *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, and averred that the *Mail* was the best index to *The Times*. His method was to glance hurriedly at the head lines of the penny paper to gain some idea of the perspective of the day's news and then to read at his leisure the longer account of the event in the heavier organ. I, for my part,

was generally content to skim one or the other for news, but to read conscientiously the leading articles of the *Thunderer*. In China we had, almost as part of our duties, to read it from cover to cover. This particular morning I picked up the *Daily Mail* first.

My eye was instantly arrested by a set of startling headlines which announced another murder in the West End. The wife of Sir Herman Wayling had been found strangled in her bedroom in the small hours of the morning. The paper had evidently exercised characteristic agility in handling the news for, late as the discovery had been made, there was a tolerably full account of the crime and a short account of the dead lady's antecedents. I read with a kind of satisfied expectancy that she had been born and educated in Cuba and had met her husband some years ago when she was dancing at the Pelagatheum Music-hall, after making a rather sensational début in Paris.

The body had been found at about one o'clock in the morning, when Sir Herman Wayling had returned home from some function. He had telephoned for the police, and I surmised that some particularly "live" reporter had been on the spot with the officer. As one will, I wondered what I had been doing at that time. I had been sound asleep, for Amy had left us at ten o'clock, and McTavish and I had turned in about an hour after that. It seemed strange that one should have been so placidly unconscious to everything when within a few hundred yards a woman had been murdered. Wayling's house was in Hardy Street, just off Darchester Square, behind which stood McTavish's disused mews. Indeed, so near was it, I realized, that had there been any fuss about the

discovery, any blowing of police whistles, I should most certainly have been wakened.

McTavish, no doubt, had risen early, picked up his paper, and gone round to investigate this new crime. Here, without question, was the second murder which he had prophesied to Inspector Ipps as we stood yesterday in the room where the first victim had been found.

The old dame who looked after us brought me my eggs and bacon and a rack of toast, and I began to eat, with the newspaper propped in front of me, although I did nothing but re-read the account which I had already mastered.

It seemed obvious to me now that McTavish's theory that the first murder had been one link in a chain of vendetta was sound. No doubt the dead man and the dead woman had had some association with each other in Cuba. It might have been that he was pursuing her to blackmail her, and had been trapped by her friends and put out of harm's way. It might even be, I found myself speculating, that she had been the slayer. A professional dancer would not be without strength, and a desperate woman might dare anything to prevent disaster and disgrace. But, if she were the culprit, who had revenged the dead man by killing her in her turn ?

No. It was more probable that whoever had killed the visiting Cuban had also killed Lady Wayling. The fair assumption was that the motive behind each murder was the same. He and she had been implicated in some common plot. If the murders were caused by revenge for treachery, each had been traitorous. If the murders had been caused by revenge for unchastity, each had been involved in the fault.

It next occurred to me that Sir Herman Wayling stood in a very uncomfortable position. His story, according to the newspaper report, was that he had arrived home about ten minutes to one, had gone straight to his dressing-room, where, as was the household custom, sandwiches and whisky-and-soda had been left for him. He had poured himself a peg and had taken up a sandwich. Holding his glass in one hand and the sandwich in the other, he had opened the communicating door to the bedroom with his foot, prepared, as most husbands would be, to recount to his wife the doings of the night and the story of the function which he had attended. Lady Wayling, it seemed, had retired about midnight, having herself been to the first night of Irving St. George's new play. The paper did not give any account of her movements beyond that one statement.

I had a vivid picture of the honest Sir Herman standing aghast as he saw the spectacle which confronted him in the bedroom—the man, munching his sandwich and holding the commonplace whisky-glass, prepared for nothing but a jolly gossip before going to bed, and the woman, prostrate across her own bed, with her lovely throat swollen and lacerated, and her face purpled by the strangulated blood.

He would most certainly be able to prove his story of his movements, but if there were a gap between his entrance to the house and his telephone message to the police he could hardly avoid suspicion. I wondered what manner of man he was, and what kind of relationship had existed between him and his wife. If his story were true, one could only deduce that they were a happy, comradely pair, since no husband

with either a grudge or a suspicion against his wife would go to her room to gossip while he swallowed his nightcap of Scotch-and-soda. But his story need not necessarily be true. He might carefully have stage-managed the scene. What if he had returned home in some towering rage against the dead woman, strangled her in his fury, arranged matters by callously taking a bite from the convenient sandwich and a gulp from the whisky, leaving both where a startled man would naturally place them, and then rung for the police ?

I had finished my eggs and bacon and was busy tackling marmalade, characteristically set in its plain grocer's pot instead of a civilized dish, when McTavish came in.

He flung off his antique inverness coat and threw his clerical hat on to the nearest chair.

"Mrs. Wantage, four eggs this morning, please," he cried. " 'Morning, Armistead. Go to the ant, thou sluggard ! I was wrong when I said that private sleuthing was a lazy business. It isn't."

"I suppose you've been to the scene of the new murder ?"

" 'And you presumes right, Miserimus.' Shocking thing—but I expected it."

"I know you did. You even prophesied it. .Well, what do you think ?"

"I think it about time that Innocent Ipps arrived."

"What, here ? Why should he ?"

"Because I've invited him to breakfast. He said he'd follow me on in a few minutes."

"I say, McTavish, I wish you'd wakened me."

"I did think of it. I came into your room, but you were sleeping like a babe. You must have a

singularly good conscience. No amount of noise seems to waken you. I might have been murdered in my own bed, but you wouldn't have stirred."

"I am a heavy sleeper, but it isn't a good conscience ; only a good liver."

"Same thing, my boy, at your age."

"Tell me about Lady Wayling."

"Horrible, my dear Armistead, perfectly horrible. There was that pretty girl—she's little more—lying over that great bed in that luxurious bedroom, choked to death. She was wearing a thin silk nightdress which was slightly disarranged, but no more than would have been caused by anyone dragging her from between the sheets, and her hands were raised to her throat, as if she'd tried to prevent the crime. Her neck is scarred just as Ipps said the other victim's neck was scarred."

"You'd no difficulty in viewing the body, then ?"

"None. I just walked past the policeman by saying I supposed Ipps was upstairs. The fool took me for a doctor or a clergyman or something comic, I suppose. Ipps was a little surprised to see me."

"He must have been early on the job."

"He was. But he'd wisely arranged that any London murder cases out of the usual run should be brought immediately to his notice."

" 'Out of the usual run !' You talk as if murders were quite common."

"So they are, the ordinary ones. Have you never looked at Assize lists ? Labourers kicking their wives to death ; fools slitting the throats of their sweethearts ; men knifing one another in drunken quarrels—as common as mud, my dear fellow. What can you

expect when fifty million human beings have spread all over a set of small islands really capable of holding about a tenth of the number? And particularly when they have contrived to herd themselves into packed communities and leave vast spaces sparsely filled. If I were a social reformer I should say that our economic system has put a premium on crimes of violence, for we have both crowded populations and isolated fragments of the community. Both conditions are conducive to ragged nerves, bad tempers, immorality, and all the other things which put men and women into murderous moods. Ah, thanks, Mrs. Wantage. There'll be another gentleman in for breakfast. Can you lay a place for him? There he is, I think."

Mrs. Wantage shuffled off to answer the knock at our front door. The next moment Inspector Ipps was in the room.

"Hello, Inspector. Take off your coat and fling it down somewhere. There are some pegs in the hall, if you'd prefer 'em, but don't expect me to interrupt my breakfast to help you. Oh, there's Armistead, always the little gentleman."

I had risen and taken the Inspector's coat and hat. I also fielded McTavish's things from where he had left them and took out my burdens to the little hall. When I returned Ipps had drawn up his chair, and was expressing a preference for bacon and eggs.

"Well, Mr. Armistead," he remarked, "this is a bad business. Lucky for us, though."

"Lucky?"

"Decidedly. We shall have something to go on now. If the idiot had only rested content with one murder we might not have found him. But it's the

old story. Over-eagerness and too much zeal have destroyed more men than vice."

"Then you have a clue ?"

"A clue ! We've bags of 'em. The one clue we lack is as to who told the Press."

"Why, what do you mean ?"

"Well, there were a pair of reporters at the house almost as soon as I arrived, and yet the police station had told nobody."

"They must have done. You know what police stations are," said McTavish, gulping down his fourth egg.

"No, sir. I'm convinced that the police didn't leak."

"Well, it's simple enough, surely. You've only to ask the newspaper offices concerned."

"Not so simple. First of all, it's the inevitable habit of the English Press to be uppish on a matter like this, and to say they never disclose the names of their informants. There was a celebrated incident a few years ago when the Home Secretary himself compelled a newspaper under threat to reveal its informant. The row that followed nearly brought down the Government. Second of all, the goldarned reporters say that they were on to it by a nose for news, whatever sort of a nose that is. Actually, I have found out that they had a telephone call."

"Then you've only to trace the caller . . ." I began.

Ipps looked at me with something of that fond pity which so often seemed to inform the gaze of McTavish when he looked at me.

"It was from a public telephone-box. In each case the telephone merchant said he was a lineage runner."

"What the devil is that ?"

"Oh, they're common enough. They are people who get on to news, fires, accidents, murders, and so on. They ring up the paper and give 'em a few lines on the thing. If the paper uses those few lines it pays for 'em. If it builds a better story of its own it pays for the information. The man gives his name, of course. In this case the name was a familiar one."

The big detective smiled as he broke off from his story to allow Mrs. Wantage to place before him the dish of bacon and eggs and a fresh teapot.

"What name was it ? If it was familiar you can soon get the man !"

"No. It was too familiar for that. The name was Ipps."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"So the name was Ipps, was it? Somebody pulling your leg," commented McTavish.

"Seems so."

"But why should anyone want to pull your leg?" I asked.

"Oh, several reasons occur to me. Sense of humour, for example."

"It rather looks," said McTavish, "as if the perpetrators of the crime wanted someone to have early information that it had been successful. There's a kind of audacity about that to be admired. You commit a murder, and in order to inform some interested party, you merely tell the world by telling a couple of newspaper offices that you've done it. Incidentally, you cover your tracks by giving as your name the distinguished patronymic of the detective whose presence on the scene is so quickly to follow."

The detective paused for a moment in the important work of mastication.

"There's another reason why it might have seemed desirable to have the thing in the London editions."

"And that is . . ."

"To enable somebody to be early himself on the scene. It would even allow the actual murderer, you see, to come back with a good excuse."

"That's a good point," said McTavish.

"Yes. I thought you'd appreciate that."

"But has anyone been yet ?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. Dozens of people."

"Dozens ! Already ?"

"Yes. And telephone-calls by the hundred, almost."

"What sort of people ?"

"Reporters, relatives, friends—and, of course, Mr. McTavish. He was about the first."

"Yes. I'm a very early riser."

"So I gather. And I suppose you go to bed correspondingly early ?"

"We must have been in bed by eleven last night, I should think, Armistead ?"

"Certainly not many minutes after. Amy went about ten o'clock, and we didn't stay up long. I remember you saying that you'd had a heavy day."

"Let's hope that all Lady Wayling's neighbours have as good an alibi."

McTavish chuckled.

"What—you don't think, do you, that Armistead and I swarmed up Wayling's drain pipes to strangle his wife ! I assure you that Armistead wouldn't strangle a yawn, much less a lady, would you, Armistead ? He's the mildest-mannered man that ever took salt tax from the poor coolie."

Inspector Ipps's next remark was slightly inconsequential.

"You've very snug quarters here, Mr. McTavish. I suppose Mr. Armistead prefers your bohemianism to the formality of his hotel."

"Very much so," I said.

Ipps stretched out his arm for the marmalade.

"I suppose you two gentlemen have known each other for a long time ?"

"Oh, no. Only since the murder."

"You don't say !"

There was, for some reason, an awkward pause in our talk.

"What about these bags full of clues that you speak of ?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. The clues. Well, to begin with, we have now a circle of persons upon whom to concentrate. There is Sir Herman Wayling's household."

"What have they to say ?"

"They heard the murderer enter."

"What !"

"It's quite true. Wayling's staff isn't very big. There is a butler and one footman and a page. That is all the males. There is a housekeeper, a cook, three maids, and Lady Wayling's own maid. That is all the females."

"Hasn't Wayling a man ?"

"No. Oddly enough, he hasn't."

"But who looks after his kit ?"

"The butler fellow, in conjunction with one of these new-fangled valeting services."

"Well, what happened when they heard the murderer enter ?"

"Just nothing. Nothing at all. Lady Wayling had come home from the theatre about eleven-fifteen. Her maid had seen her to bed and gone off to her own. Wayling had told his people not to wait up for him. At about half past twelve, not more than ten minutes after the butler had been the rounds and gone to his own room, they heard the front door opened. They heard it, as they thought, re-opened about ten minutes to one. Their assumption was that Wayling had come home when it first opened and that the second

opening was due to his having let some friend out, or to his taking, as many a man will, a peep at the night before locking up. It occurred to none of them that the first entry was that of a stranger."

"Did they, then, hear no noises—no sound of a struggle?"

"None. But why should they? The servants' quarters are well away from Lady Wayling's room, with a baize door between. Having, as they thought, heard the master come in, they simply didn't worry. That's their story."

"Is there any suspicion on any of them?" asked McTavish.

"No real suspicion. Their characters are without reproach. It is true that the dead lady had something of a temper, but her relationships with the servants were good. She and her maid were even friendly—I mean they were more intimate and chummy than one usually finds. Of course, she was a Cuban, and her mental attitude towards life was rather different from that of the English aristocratic mistress."

"I see. What traces of the murderer?"

"None. The night was fine. He stepped from clean paving stones into a hall well carpeted. He walked up the stairs, entered the dead woman's room through Wayling's dressing-room, and killed her. He left the same way."

"If he entered so, that would account for her feeling no alarm at the intrusion, one supposes. But why didn't they hear him leave, if they heard Wayling himself enter a few minutes after?"

"I simply don't know, but I expect he left with special caution. He may even have stayed doggo and not left until much later."

"What ? You think he may have been in the house when Wayling found his wife's body ?"

"It is quite possible. But not likely, I think. What he probably did was to wait outside until he saw the light go up in Lady Wayling's room, and then make for the nearest telephone-box to tell the papers to send men to the house."

"Whatever he did, he must have been a cool card."

"Very cool."

"Is there no hope that someone saw him arriving in Hardy Street ?"

"Very little. The street would be quite quiet between the arrivals of odd residents coming home. Darchester Square was quiet enough that night, for there were no functions on. All a man would have to do would be either to come quietly from the Square into Hardy Street, when no one would see him, or turn into the other end of Hardy Street, when many persons would see him, but only as one of the crowd in Vaile Street turning down a side street. Who'd notice him in such circumstances ?"

"So far, Inspector, we are assuming that the murderer who entered before Wayling says he returned was a genuine entity."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Why might it not have been Wayling himself ?"

"I've thought over that, naturally. Wayling could have entered his house at half past twelve, killed his wife, opened and closed his own front door at ten to one, and then made the 'discovery' of his own victim. Why should he ? What motive ?"

"One motive immediately suggests itself. Here we have a mysterious Cuban killed in the heart of the City, and then a Cuban lady murdered. Doesn't that suggest

that someone knew of and resented some guilty intimacy between them?"

"It might. But if Lady Wayling had expected a visit from the murdered man, wouldn't she have come forward to identify him when the news of his death was published, or, failing that, would she not have been on her guard against some attack on herself? As things were, she neither showed signs of knowing the man nor of suspecting that her own life was in jeopardy."

"You are, I suppose, checking Wayling's movements?"

"Most carefully. It may prove that he could not have reached home earlier than the time he says."

"How did he come?"

"He walked."

"From where?"

"Pottifer Square."

"That will be not more than five minutes' walk. On a fine night the average man would as lief walk as take a vehicle. He certainly would not order out his own car. You have simply to find, then, what time he left his host's house?"

"Yes. But that may be more difficult than it seems, you know, for people don't precisely notice what time they or others leave."

"True. But a twenty minutes' gap between stated times would be noticeable."

"It would. On the other hand, Wayling may have chatted to somebody on the doorstep, or leisurely strolled along. He says he came straight back and made no detours."

"Does he know of anyone with a grudge against him or his wife?"

"No. But he is quite frank in this, that he knew very little of his wife's antecedents when he married her. He seems genuinely distraught by her terrible end. I have so far found no reason to suspect anything but the most idyllic relationship between them."

"You think, then, that she was the victim of some early Cuban vendetta ?"

Innocent Ipps stood up from the table and helped himself to a cigarette from the case I proffered him. He was looking down on McTavish, who remained seated.

"I think nothing so definite yet," he said. "There is one vital consideration in my mind."

"And that is ?"

"Whoever killed Lady Wayling was aware of the general domestic arrangements of the household and had some knowledge of the movements of both the wife and the husband last night."

"Pooh, anybody might have knowledge of their movements. They'd be well paragraphed in yesterday's papers. If she were one of the first-night crowd at Irving St. George's new play and he was at Templeton's reception at Pottifer House it would be common knowledge to the gossip-readers."

"Yes. But would it be common knowledge that he would tell his staff not to wait up for him, or that she was coming sedately back from the theatre and not going on to some other function ?"

"Probably not."

"Would it be a casual thing that the murderer had a latchkey to the house ?"

"We don't know that he had. I should have thought that, unless it was a Yale lock, a good skeleton-key manipulator would have no difficulty in getting in.

But what you are driving at is, I suppose, that there was probably an accomplice inside the place ?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it ? Or a very close watcher outside it."

McTavish also rose from his chair. I sat still, looking at the two big men, so oddly contrasted in all save bulk. The round, ingenuous face of Innocent Ipps and the beaked and Punch-like face of McTavish, the complacent and comfortable carriage of the official detective and the bent and almost tortured stoop of the amateur, the slight American intonation of the voice of the one and the slow, measured English accent of the other, as they spoke, added to the sense of unreality that two such men should in my presence be calmly discussing a double murder.

"You don't think, then, that somebody may just have taken a chance, being blind to all risk because of the urgency of his motive or the potency of his homicidal mania ?" asked McTavish.

"No, I don't think that. As I say, I think that either someone inside was in touch with the murderer, or that someone outside was keeping a close and astute watch."

He turned to pass from the room to the little hall.

"It might pay us," he said, "to find that watcher first. Well, thanks for the breakfast. I must get back now and justify my existence."

"Who shall watch for the watcher ?" murmured McTavish.

"Precisely. Who shall watch for the watcher ? Ah, what a vision ! A pocket Aurora. Good morning, Miss Renton."

The front door had opened and Amy had come into

the hall. I could not see her from where I sat, but I heard her voice in reply.

"Good morning, Mr. Ipps. What brings you round so early ?"

She was unaware, it seemed, of the new tragedy.

"Mr. McTavish will tell you. I must hurry away. You know, you have the brightest pair of eyes I've seen for a long time, Miss Renton."

And with that good-humoured compliment he went.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

O. Swete McTavish gave us one of his frequent diatribes on amateur detection while Mrs. Wantage cleared the table and Amy Renton tried to tidy the room a little. He had flung himself lazily down on the chesterfield couch and had donned again the absurd fez which he wore about the house. The long, porcelain pipe dangled in his fingers.

"You know," he began oracularly, "an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory. I've never believed it until now. That was probably because I was bred to be a preacher of theory. But I believe it now. The great mistake, the utterly unwarranted assumption that I've made in writing detective-stories—the unwarrantable assumption that everybody makes—is that any amateur detective is allowed the full access to the crime and its circumstances necessary to its solution. If the police permitted it, his own resources would prohibit it.

"Look at Innocent Ipps. Here he is, wanting half a dozen things done. He wants watchers watched for. He wants movements tracking. He wants persons interrogated. What does he do? He starts the machine, and all these things are done for him. Supposing you and I and Amy, Armistead, tried to interrogate Templeton and his guests as to what time exactly Wayling left, and put the Wayling servants to

the question, what'd happen to us? We'd be booted out, or told to mind our own blooming business. And quite right, too. Of course, Mr. Sherlock Holmes would manage it. Either he'd be retained by some convenient client who would give him a standing, or he'd know something about Templeton, or he'd have fought five rounds with Wayling's butler when they were both young men.

"And, as for Father Brown, he'd have been called in at the right moment from the deaf school to minister to a Catholic maid. Of course, Edgar Wallace is clever enough to make his detectives officials, so that the difficulty doesn't arise. But, as we have seen this week, the intruding amateur, even when he has the goodwill of the police, doesn't have anything of a show, really. Even when I barged in this morning I wasn't allowed to crawl about with my little tape-measure, or run my lens over the eiderdown. Not, by the way, that I have a lens. Amy, remind me to buy three detectives' pocket lenses, will you? Perhaps we can do without a tape-measure. After all, most people would lend us a tape-measure. What was I saying? Oh, yes, even this morning when I barged my way in I wasn't allowed to monkey about. Old Ipps was civil but restrained. I don't know if he'd been crawling about on his tummy, but he offered me no encouragement to crawl about on mine."

"What on earth are you talking about, Mr. McTavish?" asked Amy.

"Private detecting, my dear. I was giving you and Armistead a helpful lecture on technique."

"But what happened this morning? Inspector Ipps said you'd tell me why he came round. There's nothing wrong, is there?"

She had parcelled away the old newspapers, had stacked the more errant books into some kind of order, had whisked the chairs into place, and now stood before the fire, looking from McTavish to me.

I felt something very like affection for her, she was so vibrant and alive. Her small face, with its milk-pure skin under the flaming red hair, was indeed lighted, as Ipps had said, by a pair of abnormally bright eyes. Her clothes, showing signs of very careful tending, were neat and simple, so that their shabbiness was not apparent until one looked closely at them. I noticed a small darn at one elbow of her knitted jumper. McTavish's eccentric offer of a secretaryship must have been a godsend to her, I thought.

"There's nothing wrong, is there?" she repeated.

"Not with us. But haven't you seen a paper this morning?"

"I'm afraid I haven't. I waited until I got here." It was, to me, another pitiful reminder of her poverty. She had had recently no pennies to waste on newspapers.

I picked up the *Mail*, which, in her moments of tidying, she had neatly folded and replaced on the cleared table. I reopened it at the news of Lady Wayling's murder and passed it to her.

McTavish and I watched her face with some interest as she read. It did not blanch or show very much agitation, but her lips tightened and the expressive eyes widened a little.

"What a shocking thing!" was her first comment. "I suppose there is no question of its being the same murderer?"

"Hardly. It does not say so there, but the throat was marked in just the same way as if she had been garrotted."

"What are you going to do ?"

"Going to do ? I've already done it—or some of it. I've seen the body and we've had Inspector Ipps to breakfast."

"You've seen the body ? How did you hear about it ?"

McTavish waved his hand towards the paper she still held.

"I happened to be up very early," he explained.

"But what next ?"

"Ah, Ipps is going through the usual routine, examining servants, questioning visitors who display any anxiety about Lady Wayling's fate, and so on. That will keep him busy for a bit, and if he's the fellow I take him for, he'll tell us anything we ought to know. As for me, I'm going to endeavour to persuade Sir Herman Wayling to employ me."

"To employ you ?"

"Yes. Here's the standing in this case we've hitherto lacked. We've been admitted to the wings by kind permission of the management, meaning Innocent Ipps, but if Wayling gives us a commission definitely to investigate his wife's filthy murder, then we can take the actual stage with the other principals."

"How do you propose 'working' this commission ?"

"I've left word that we are coming round to see him at eleven-thirty."

" 'We' ?"

"Yes. You and me, Armistead."

"Will he see us ?"

"I think he will. He'll have been harassed by the police, and he's quite honestly distraught by the tragedy. He'll welcome some help, I think. But if he sees us he may not engage us. There we shall

have to take the risk, to 'chance our arm', as they say in the Army."

"Do you know him ?"

"I've met him. In fact, I've met them both. That was partly why the sight of that poor girl was so shocking."

There was an agitated knock at the front door. Mrs. Wantage came shuffling from the inner room to answer it.

"It's all right, Mrs. Wantage," said McTavish, and sent her shuffling back. "Would you mind answering that, Amy ? It might be a uniformed policeman, and I don't want that old dame gossiping about the neighbourhood."

Amy flung the paper down on the table and crossed the little hall.

She was back in a moment, with a tall man following close behind her.

"It's Sir Herman Wayling," she said.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

McTavish and I sprang to our feet as our visitor came into the room. Sir Herman Wayling might be distraught, but he was not dishevelled. He was a tall man of about forty-five, dressed in a dark lounge suit and perfectly groomed. His open face, decorated, if not adorned, by a fair moustache and a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez with a thick cord, was at once frank and stupid. It was not that he seemed to lack intelligence, but that one immediately suspected his mind of working slowly.

"They gave me your note," he said as he shook hands with McTavish, "and, as I had to come out, I thought I'd look in to see you. It was good of you to offer to help, but I don't know that——"

McTavish interrupted him.

"Sit down, Sir Herman. This is my friend and partner, Mr. Armistead. Miss Renton, my secretary."

Sir Herman Wayling bowed to us in turn and found a chair, glancing round the small room with slightly bewildered eyes. He was like a man still dazed from the shock of his early morning discovery.

"This is a bad business," he said. Under no circumstances, however tragic, however exciting, would such a man use superlatives, I suspected.

McTavish was busy with a whisky decanter and a siphon.

"Drink this. Have you breakfasted ?"

"Yes, I think so. Oh, yes. They made me take a hot tub and change my kit, and eat a bit of breakfast, before I talked to the detectives."

"Where are you going now ?"

"There are certain things to be done, you know—I shall have to have the vault opened, and order things . . ."

"Can't some of your people do that ?"

"They could, but I'd rather do it for myself. Poor Lola. It's the last thing I shall ever do for her."

McTavish, so like some big grotesque in appearance, was all tenderness as he stood by the stricken man.

"Come, come, my dear fellow !"

Wayling gulped down the whisky-and-soda like a man performing some quite mechanical action. McTavish refilled the glass and then drew up a chair so that he faced his guest, their knees almost touching.

"Have you any idea who did this thing ?" he asked.

"Not the slightest. It's all mystery to me. I didn't think we had an enemy in the world. Of course, I don't know much about Lola's early life. I never asked. She had a very thin time of it, poor child, before I met her."

"She came from Cuba. Had she many Cuban friends ?"

"A few ; not very many."

"Do you think she had any reason to expect an attack on her life ?"

"I'm sure she hadn't."

"We can assume, can't we, that you desire to bring whoever did this thing to justice ?"

"There's nothing I desire more. I'm not a vengeful

or vindictive man, McTavish, but, I tell you, I'll not rest until the fiend who killed Lola is hanged. I'll not rest, I tell you, whether I'm in my own grave or out of it."

There was something uncanny in this passionate outburst, delivered in the same low tone that characterized all Wayling's speech and with no gesture as its utterer sat hunched up in the arm chair where McTavish had placed him.

There was a moment of silence.

"My friend Armistead and I, Sir Herman, have a special reason for wanting to track that fiend. Will you authorize us to act on your behalf ?"

Even in the midst of his acute grief and vengeful mood, Sir Herman retained his natural caution. He did not commit himself.

"You have a special reason ? What is it ? Did you know Lola ?"

"I knew her, slightly, as I know you. But our reason—our special reason—has not to do with you and Lady Wayling. We found the murdering fiend's other victim."

"His other victim ?"

"Didn't you know ? Hasn't Ipps told you ?"

Wayling shook his head. McTavish, in a very few words, told him of our odd experience of the Friday night in Bishopsgate.

"It looks like some kind of plot—a vendetta," said the baronet heavily.

"That was our first assumption. But the point is . . ." He explained slowly and painstakingly how complete was our disability while we remained without any official standing in the investigation which was in the charge of Ipps.

"Are you a professional detective? I thought that you . . ."

"No, I'm not a professional detective. I'm not even a real amateur. Call me a meddling criminologist, if you wish. But he assured that I am as intent as you, who have better reason, on hounding down the murderer of your wife. I want only your authorization."

Wayling thought for a moment, his dull eyes on those brighter which McTavish thrust into his face.

"Yes, yes," he said at length, "I'd like you to act for me, if you see any hope."

"Good!"

McTavish rose and crossed to a small side bureau, where he wrote hurriedly.

"Sign this for me, will you?"

Wayling glanced down the half-sheet of notepaper and signed it. McTavish flung it across to Amy.

"File that, please, in copy. I shall have to carry the original. It's our warrant of authenticity. Now we can act. And we'd better act quickly. Anything may happen. You may be, yourself, arrested."

"What!"

It was palpable that Sir Herman had not so much as contemplated any doubt of his own innocence or of the complete truth of his story. Never have I seen horrified innocence so plainly depicted on a man's face.

"I say you may be, yourself, arrested," repeated McTavish relentlessly. "Or you may be, yourself, attacked by those who have killed your wife."

"But this is London . . ."

"I know it is London. Good God, man, after what

you have seen and felt since last night, you don't suppose that being in London confers complete immunity from outrage and sudden death !"

"No," said Wayling slowly, "but it takes a man time to realize what has happened."

He was infinitely pathetic, I thought, but McTavish showed signs of impatience.

"It won't take long for a man to realize what has happened if these fiends who killed your wife strike again, or if the official police decide to apprehend you on suspicion of having caused her death. What is happening to Lady Wayling's papers ?"

"Her papers ?"

"Yes, man, yes. Her papers. Letters, passports, old dance programmes, cheque-book counterfoils, receipts, and all the other litter that men and women so carefully keep ?"

"I don't know. I suppose the police are examining them."

"Then come back to your house. You can postpone your other calls. Come, Armistead, get on your shoes and your hat. Amy, you'd better stay here and answer any callers."

As he spoke he was again slipping into the inverness coat and donning his black hat. I made haste to obey his commands, and in a few moments we were leaving the mews and walking rapidly towards Sir Herman's big house in Hardy Street.

The officer on the door could not bar the way to the owner and his friends, and we passed in without hindrance.

"You see, Armistead ? An old-fashioned latch. A skeleton would open that in two seconds. Whoever did this thing came serenely in, up those carpeted stairs,

into Sir Herman's dressing-room, which is the first door on the first landing."

We went up, as the murderer had done. There was a second policeman at the door of Sir Herman's room.

"Who's inside ?" asked McTavish.

"Inspector Ipps and the doctor, sir. Nobody is to go in."

"Then ask Inspector Ipps to step out for a moment."

"I don't think, sir, that——" protested the officer, but McTavish cut short his words by tapping imperatively on the panels of the door.

" 'Ere ! You shouldn't 'ave done that," said the constable, more in sorrow than in anger.

There was a movement inside the room. The door was opened, and Ipps stood on the threshold, surveying us with narrowed and not-too-friendly eyes.

"Oh, it's you, is it ? Well, Sir Herman ?" He kept the door only slightly ajar, as if to keep from our view whatever horror was within the room. Sir Herman blinked at him and then, with his habitual air of bewildered stupidity, stammered his explanation.

"My friend—McTavish—kindly going to look into things for me—thought you'd give him every help—don't want to complicate things—but felt—was told——"

"Ah ! So Mr. McTavish is going to look into things, eh ? But he has been looking into things. All right, Sir Herman. Of course, you are perfectly entitled to call in any friend you wish. But there is no need for you to stay."

Sir Herman said a word or two of almost inarticulate thanks and left us. Ipps stood for a moment as if in indecision.

"You'd better come in, gentlemen," he said at last,

and McTavish and I, stepping with that soft tread which one instinctively uses in the presence of death, followed him into the room. To my amazement, the dressing-room was in its normal neat and tidy order, and through the communicating door to the bedroom one saw nothing but a sheeted form on the bed. By the bedroom window stood a square-set man, placidly gazing out on to Hardy Street and the houses opposite.

Innocent Ipps led us into the bigger room.

"Two of Sir Herman's friends, doctor. This is Doctor Blate, our divisional surgeon. Mr. McTavish, Mr. Armistead."

We exchanged greetings.

"You've made your report, Doctor?" asked McTavish.

"No, not yet. But the material is ready. There's very little to be said. She was garrotted all right. Inspector Ipps was telling me of the other case. I didn't see that body. You two gentlemen, I'm told, actually discovered it."

"No, not quite. We were the first on the scene, but the actual discovery was made by a girl."

"Oh, yes, of course. I remember now."

There was an awkward pause, which McTavish broke.

"Inspector, I want to go over the dead woman's effects with you. I have permission from Sir Herman."

"Why, certainly. You don't want to see her again?"

McTavish shook his head.

"Once was quite enough."

"Mr. Armistead?" He moved towards the bed.

"No, thank you," I answered, perhaps a shade too hurriedly.

into Sir Herman's dressing-room, which is the first door on the first landing."

We went up, as the murderer had done. There was a second policeman at the door of Sir Herman's room.

"Who's inside ?" asked McTavish.

"Inspector Ipps and the doctor, sir. Nobody is to go in."

"Then ask Inspector Ipps to step out for a moment."

"I don't think, sir, that——" protested the officer, but McTavish cut short his words by tapping imperatively on the panels of the door.

" 'Ere ! You shouldn't 'ave done that," said the constable, more in sorrow than in anger.

There was a movement inside the room. The door was opened, and Ipps stood on the threshold, surveying us with narrowed and not-too-friendly eyes.

"Oh, it's you, is it ? Well, Sir Herman ?" He kept the door only slightly ajar, as if to keep from our view whatever horror was within the room. Sir Herman blinked at him and then, with his habitual air of bewildered stupidity, stammered his explanation.

"My friend—McTavish—kindly going to look into things for me—thought you'd give him every help—don't want to complicate things—but felt—was told——"

"Ah ! So Mr. McTavish is going to look into things, eh ? But he has been looking into things. All right, Sir Herman. Of course, you are perfectly entitled to call in any friend you wish. But there is no need for you to stay."

Sir Herman said a word or two of almost inarticulate thanks and left us. Ipps stood for a moment as if in indecision.

"You'd better come in, gentlemen," he said at last,

and McTavish and I, stepping with that soft tread which one instinctively uses in the presence of death, followed him into the room. To my amazement, the dressing-room was in its normal neat and tidy order, and through the communicating door to the bedroom one saw nothing but a sheeted form on the bed. By the bedroom window stood a square-set man, placidly gazing out on to Hardy Street and the houses opposite.

Innocent Ipps led us into the bigger room.

"Two of Sir Herman's friends, doctor. This is Doctor Blate, our divisional surgeon. Mr. McTavish, Mr. Armistead."

We exchanged greetings.

"You've made your report, Doctor?" asked McTavish.

"No, not yet. But the material is ready. There's very little to be said. She was garrotted all right. Inspector Ipps was telling me of the other case. I didn't see that body. You two gentlemen, I'm told, actually discovered it."

"No, not quite. We were the first on the scene, but the actual discovery was made by a girl."

"Oh, yes, of course. I remember now."

There was an awkward pause, which McTavish broke.

"Inspector, I want to go over the dead woman's effects with you. I have permission from Sir Herman."

"Why, certainly. You don't want to see her again?"

McTavish shook his head.

"Once was quite enough."

"Mr. Armistead?" He moved towards the bed.

"No, thank you," I answered, perhaps a shade too hurriedly.

"I've had a quick glance through these wardrobes and the dressing-table drawers. There is nothing here of any great significance. She seems to have kept everything in the next room. It is what the last generation would have called her boudoir. You see, the three rooms, his dressing-room, her bedroom, and this third room, are one self-contained suite, with inter-communicating doors. That other door, there, leads to a small bathroom. Quite a modern addition, made by slicing off a part of the dressing-room."

"Interesting. Has the bathroom a second door to the dressing-room?"

"No. You think the murderer might have hidden there and made his escape when he heard the husband enter this room? I thought of that, too, but it can't have been so. He may, of course, have taken cover there and emerged from this room when he heard the husband first leave it. But that would have been a great risk to take. I think it was all quickly done and the murderer was off the premises before Wayling came in."

"Well, let us have a look at her room."

We passed through the second door and found ourselves in a small sitting-room, very luxuriously furnished with easy divans, a small sideboard, on which stood an electric chafing-dish and an array of bottles, an antique corner cupboard and a writing-bureau. There was a small, standing bookcase carelessly filled with books.

McTavish ran his eye round the room.

"Ah, this fairly shouts aloud, doesn't it? You get the exotic flavour of the lady, Armistead. This, I warrant you, was the temple of *her* marital rites, and not the bedroom. Look at that divan before the open

fire, and the tempting array of liqueurs and fruit." He crossed to the bookcase. "What's here? A set of Guy de Maupassant. Pierre Louys. Three volumes of D. H. Lawrence. Half a dozen shockers—gad! What stuff—*Desert Passion*. Hello, Armistead, a couple of detective-stories, one by Alfred Bruce. What unsuspected people one has entertained in one's time. Paul Knock in the original French, five volumes of him. She had a sensual taste in literature, this poor lady. Ah, and here? A missal. She was of the Faith, then?"

"She was a Roman Catholic, yes," said Ipps.

"Well, perhaps she could afford to be a little sensual in her reading matter. What of Wayling—is he, too, of the Faith?"

"No. I fancy he's a modern indifferentist. He was bred a sound Churchman, I believe."

"She didn't decorate her walls much, one notices. A Medici print of the Madonna of the Chair. One of Fallow's water-colours. What charming work the man does!" He was moving from wall to wall as he spoke. "A portrait of Prince Maurice of Slavonia, autographed and inscribed to the lady by her maiden name. And a photograph of a foreign-looking coastline, probably Cuba. I realize, Armistead, that I am a grossly untravelled wight." He turned abruptly to Ipps. "There was nothing disturbed in this room, I suppose?"

"It hadn't even been entered."

"Nor in the other rooms?"

"Nothing."

"There was no sign, I suppose, of anything having been snatched from her throat?"

"Snatched from her throat . . .?"

"Yes. A locket, or a chain, or a rosary, or anything of that kind."

"No sign at all. Whatever the motive was, it wasn't theft, not even specialized theft."

It occurred to me that McTavish had fully taken charge now of the investigation. Ipps sat on one of the divans and watched the other as he moved about the room, answering what questions were put to him with a kind of urbane readiness to oblige one to whom his help had been pledged. None the less, I fancied that in his wide eyes there was a faint touch of the ironic, as if he were a distinguished critic, watching and condoning, but not really apprecaiting, a piece of extremely good amateur acting.

"Well," said my peculiar friend, "what about tackling this bureau? I suppose the lady had a key to it somewhere handy?"

"You won't need a key," said Ipps, "it isn't locked."

"You've been through it?"

"No, not really. But I naturally had a quick glance at it. I haven't turned out the papers or examined anything in detail. As a matter of fact, I was going to make that my next job. But we don't, you know, do these things singlehanded. We like a witness."

"Well, we can save one of your official colleagues some of his valuable time. Here are Armistead and I, aching to witness your search. Let's begin. Here, if anywhere, we should find something to throw a little light on things."

"I wonder?" said Ipps, placidly, as he drew a chair up to the desk and opened the lid of the bureau. "I wonder?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FOR half an hour we went steadily through the commonplace, pathetic jumble in the dead woman's little desk. There were, as McTavish had said, the usual petty but endearing relics of old days—dance programmes of the modern kind, which were not programmes at all but mere summonses to dance, theatre programmes, snapshots, letters, stray cuttings from newspapers, an odd page from a fashion magazine, an advertisement for some female remedy for obesity, such a jumble, in short, as would have delighted the heart of James Joyce, but which was of little significance for our immediate purpose. The letters we skimmed hurriedly. None was of importance.

"Surely she had other archives?" said McTavish when the last drawer had been emptied. "You are sure there is nothing in the dressing-table? That's a favourite place for keeping papers."

"Quite sure."

"Then what a blameless soul she must have been, for all her sensual tastes and her hectic dancer's past. There is nothing here that would sully the fair fame of a churchwarden's wife. And yet . . . "

He crossed the room to where the portrait of the Balkan princeling was hung.

"Dammit, a girl can't have had such distinguished suitors as this without keeping some relics."

"She may have kept her more intimate papers at the bank or in some safe deposit," said Ipps.

"Possible, but not very probable. Let's have her maid up."

Ipps stepped on to the landing and spoke to the constable. In a few moments Lady Wayling's maid was with us.

She was a small, dark girl, quite undistinguished and not even pretty. Her eyes were red with weeping and her face blotched by the tears. She gave a frightened glance at the Inspector.

"Sit down, my dear," said McTavish with his slow, comforting avuncular intonation.

She perched herself timidly at the extreme edge of one of the divans. He seated himself in the corner of the same couch, leaning towards the girl. By some magic of his own he seemed by his mere poise to establish a sense of confidence and even friendly intimacy between them.

"Tell me, where did your mistress keep her old letters and things ?"

"In there, sir."

She nodded towards the bureau.

"Anywhere else ?"

"I don't know of anywhere else, unless there are some in her desk in the library. I haven't often been in the library."

"She had a desk of her own there ?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Did you see very much of your mistress's friends ?"

"No, sir."

"Who would see them ?"

"Mr. Tollinson, sir, and the other staff."

"Mr. Tollinson is the butler, is he ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lady Wayling didn't receive her friends up here, ever ?"

"No, sir."

"Had she many friends of her own—I mean, for example, foreign friends who came to see her and not Sir Herman ?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Who brought her morning's letters to her ?"

"I did, sir."

"Can you remember if she had a foreign letter last Friday—or Thursday—or any day last week ?"

"She often had foreign letters."

"From South America ?"

"From all over the world, I think. There were some from South America. That was her home."

"Did she talk to you much about her home ?"

"She was a very friendly lady. She talked to me about most things."

"How long have you been with her ?"

"About three years."

"Did she receive any particular regular letter from South America ?"

"I never noticed. I don't think so. Of course, they came by a regular mail-day. She used to ask sometimes if the mail was in, because at times it would be a day late."

"Quite so. Did she ask last week about the mail being in ?"

"No, sir. It was in to time last week."

"Now, tell me, when she had read her letters, what did she do with them ? Did she crumple them up and throw them down, or leave them on her tray, or take them away to some place ?"

The girl thought for a moment.

"It all depended. Some she just threw down. Others she put back in their envelopes and kept."

"But you don't know where she kept them, eh ?"

"I thought she kept them in that little desk."

"Your mistress was happy ?"

"Oh, very happy. Like a great child, she was. Pleased with everything and everybody."

"Ummmm. She and Sir Herman got on well together ?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Proper playmates, as you might say."

"I see. Well, that's all I wanted to know. By the way, what is your name ?"

"Riggs, sir."

"And your other name ?"

"Theresa, sir."

"Are you a Roman Catholic, Theresa ?"

"Yes, sir."

"You and your mistress attended the same church, I suppose ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you go together ?"

"Always."

"She was a devout Catholic—made her confession regularly and went to Mass regularly ?"

"She went to Mass every morning, sir. She made a weekly confession. We both did."

"Thank you, Theresa."

The girl went out.

"You've had your talk with her, I see," said McTavish to Ipps.

"Yes."

"Funny how frightened these people are of a police interrogation, isn't it ?"

"Yes. They think we want to get them at all costs, whether they're guilty or not."

"But, of course, you don't, do you ?" Ipp's bland innocence was beautifully matched by the tone of this question. He took the satire good-humouredly.

"We'd better trot down the stairway and look into this other desk," was all he said, with a grin wrinkling his large, babyish face.

The library was an imposing room, quite the biggest in the house, but it was a library only by courtesy. Some previous tenant or owner had had it beautifully fitted with inset shelves, but most of these lacked books. They were occupied instead with odd pieces of china and glass, as if these ornaments had been selected at random to hide the bleakness of the room rather than chosen with care for their own intrinsic merits.

There were two desks in the room, one in the very centre of the floor and a smaller one in a recess. The larger was of the familiar table pattern, its spacious top covered in dark-green leather. The smaller was of that annoying, semi-ornamental kind with a set of crazy, leaded book-shelves over it. The shelves held a standard set of books of reference, bound in expensive green leather and quite obviously supplied with the piece of furniture. One doubted if any of the volumes had been opened. At either side of the shelves was a small recess. Into one of these there had been thrust three or four yellow-backed French novels, and into the other a number of magazines of a popular type.

I mention these things because it seemed to me, from the very savour of the room and the desk, that

whatever attachments Lady Wayling had kept with her native land, they were not political.

McTavish tried the desk-lid and the top drawer.

"Locked this time, all right. There are no keyholes to the drawers. The lid locks the lot. What about her keys ?"

Ipps put his hand into the side pocket of his coat and produced a key-ring and keys with a small label attached.

"Exhibit fourteen," murmured McTavish, taking it from him and trying the smaller keys to the desk. The lock clicked back and the lid went up.

The interior of this desk was much more orderly than that of the bureau upstairs. Into their various receptacles were neatly fitted the different sizes of note-paper and envelopes, correspondence cards, and all the paraphernalia of the society woman who does much, if not all, of her own letter-writing. There were the inevitable three sticks of coloured sealing-wax and the box of coloured gummed-wafers.

McTavish dropped his bulk into the delicate period writing-chair. Ipps drew up another. I contented myself with standing behind them.

As he ran his nimble hands and quick eyes over the contents of the desk, McTavish talked, more to himself than to us.

"Nothing here. What's in these little drawers ? Pins, paper-fasteners, gummed labels. Hello, foreign stamps. She must have been saving these for some small boy. French, German, Russian, and a mass of Cuban. She had, as that girl said, a wide range of correspondents. But she would have. A cosmopolitan dancer. And here ? Good heavens ! A powder-puff in a silver box, a broken necklace of culture pearls, a

gold safety-pin, and a ha'penny. Isn't that typical of a woman? Now for the larger drawers. Here? Nothing exciting, apparently. Foolscap paper and quarto paper in boxes. Did she contemplate writing her memoirs, like Sara Duncan? And here? Good Lord! Six pairs of silk stockings and a scarf. And here? A deep, bottom drawer full of copies of a film paper. Simple tastes she had. . . .

"Now for the other side. This should be more promising. The right-hand side of a right-handed user. Top—nothing but litter, pencils, string, old labels, brown paper, saved heaven knows why! And next? Boxes of envelopes and packets of headed stationery. And the bottom drawer?" He slid it out and gave a grunt of satisfaction at what it revealed. "We are growing hot, Inspector. Photographs and letters. We'd better have this lot up on the table, there."

He lifted the drawer and carried it to the centre of the room. We drew up three chairs, he and Ipps together, and I at the end of the table-desk.

The photographs were at the top of the drawer, thrown carelessly in. The letters were, however, neatly bundled and tied with riband, three neat packets. We looked through the photographs first. They would have been an interesting collection had we not been intent on our tragic and terrible task. Half a hundred autographed photographs of celebrities, mostly actors and actresses, with a sprinkling of minor politicians and a few popular writers, formed the bulk of the collection, with a few family photographs to make up the total. These last were very mixed. There were one or two Victorian groups at which McTavish looked curiously.

"Ah! Herman Wayling as a baby in arms. And as a small boy in a velvet suit. And here is one of a

little girl with long curls, against the familiar foreign landscape. This is probably Lola, aged ten. And another, apparently of a Spanish grandee and his Castilian wife. These will be Lola's papa and mamma. What are these—aunts and uncles and a grandfather or two? Nothing to worry us, I fancy. No portraits of interesting Cubans of Lola's own age. No photograph even remotely resembling the dead man of last Friday.

"Now for the letters. First bundle—letters from home, quite obviously. Why am I not proficient in languages! Still, I can stumble along. It's a series of home gossip, right enough. You'd better have them properly translated, Ipps, just in case. . . . And these in the second bundle. Ah! Wayling's love-letters. I'm a poor sleuth, Inspector. I can hardly bring myself to pry into these." He glanced down the first one. "The poor, halting, tongue-tied, pen-tied Englishman making his first real approach. What devotion she had aroused in him!"

For a moment or two he was silent as he glanced rapidly over the other letters in the bundle. "Nothing—nothing at all. There isn't even a mention of a hated rival or an indication that her constant court of suitors so much as irritated him. As for Cuba—she might have been an English girl, the way he wrote to her. What a good, transparent chap he is. And the third bundle?"

He slipped off the riband, we watching him with, if possible, a quickened interest. It seemed that if nothing emerged from these carefully preserved letters we should have no available clue to the connection between a visiting Cuban garrotted in the City and Sir Herman Wayling's Cuban wife garrotted in Mayfair.

This time McTavish did not talk as he read, nor did he merely skim the letters. He read intently, line by line, his grotesque face made even more grotesque by the frown which disfigured it. As he finished each letter he passed it to Ipps, who also read grimly. They had both, I think, forgotten me, as I sat like some patient super allowed to walk the stage with them but not to act. Not until Ipps had read the last of the letters did he remember me, and then, with a word of apology, he passed to me the little bundle.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THERE seemed to me to be nothing in the few letters which comprised this bundle to make McTavish and Inspector Ipps so suddenly solemn. They were written by a woman who signed herself only by the single initial "L.", and they were mere gossipy accounts of herself and, apparently, her small son, with whom she was staying on the coast. The fifth letter was rather more serious in tone and recounted the attempt of somebody unnamed to persuade her to send the boy "home". This request she had refused. The sixth and last letter announced her intention of leaving the seaside and returning to London. The date of the letters was not given, each being headed, feminine fashion, only by the day of the week, but, from the colour of the ink, I surmised that they had been written some few years ago.

As I finished each letter I laid it down on the table, and McTavish picked it up to re-read it. Neither he nor the Inspector had uttered a word since the packet was opened.

"Well," I said, "there doesn't seem to me to be much in these."

McTavish gave me that pitying smile of his.

"What, then, do you make of them, my dear Armistead ?"

"They seem to me to be from her sister or somebody, telling about a summer holiday."

"Did you notice anything strange in the construction of the letters?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Listen to this: 'I shall stay here with the boy, whatever I may do.' Isn't that rather an odd sentence? And again: 'If the arrangement is to end, I must understand that I shall not be afraid to part with the boy.' What of that?"

"It is, perhaps, a bit queer. 'I must understand that I shall not be afraid to part with the boy.' Yes, it's like a foreigner writing, perhaps."

"Does the signature convey nothing to you?"

"There is no signature. There's only an initial."

"Does that initial convey nothing?"

"No."

"Why should Lady Wayling keep these letters so carefully? Why should anyone write to her in such a strain about a small boy's holiday and the attempt of someone else to have him 'home' and to part him from the writer? She kept them because she wrote them."

He glanced over to where Ipps was again looking over the correspondence.

"Isn't that so, Inspector?"

"Yes, I think so. We can easily test it. There's been no attempt to disguise the handwriting."

"The queer construction of those sentences is due to an obvious cause. She was using initials for some reason."

"Well?"

"The letter 'I' in one case is the first personal singular pronoun. In the other case it is the first letter of somebody's name. Now do you follow?"

"Yes. She was in antagonism to somebody whose initial was 'I'."

"Exactly. Somebody, let us assume, called Irma, or Ira, or Isabel. She was a Cuban. In Latin-America there are many common-enough Christian names beginning with that letter. It might, of course, be a surname, but women, as a rule, don't use or contract surnames as men do. The point is, who was the child? There is no date on these letters, but they were written a few years ago, one supposes, from the look of the ink and the folds of the paper. There has never been any suggestion that Lady Wayling herself ever had a child. At the time these letters were written she was probably already married, and the boy in the letters, from what she said of him, must have been quite five or six years old. If it had been her child, she could have been little more than a schoolgirl's age when he was born. No, I think we can assume that she was not the mother, but the mother's helpful friend—or the father's helpful friend."

"Can it have been Wayling's child?"

"Very unlikely. Even the most adoring of young wives would hardly write in this strain of a child of her husband's born out of wedlock by some other woman. But Wayling must know whose child it was. There is a strong presumption that the really interested person is dead."

"Why?"

"Lady Wayling's letters have come back into her possession again. Either the recipient returned them or they were returned when their original recipient's effects were distributed on death."

"That seems feasible enough."

"The real point is that for the first time we seem

to come within reach of a possible motive for murder. A few years ago the dead woman involved herself in some kind of quite bitter quarrel about the custody of a child. Whose child? Why was she prepared to involve herself? Where is the child now? Who was the objecting person of whose interference she was frightened?"

"Frightened?"

"Yes. Look at the gallant attempt to bluff. If she is told that the arrangement is to come to an end, she says that this mysterious person must understand that she will not be afraid to part with the boy. That is, surely, an oblique way of telling the other person that if the child leaves her, others will guard it. The whole tone of the correspondence is odd. For the most part, the letters say little beyond what any woman amusing a child at the seaside might write. Then begin these almost reluctant references to the call for the boy. It is as if for some time she had tried to ignore the increasing pressure from the other party to the correspondence, then gave slight answers, and then was compelled to define her position."

"Couldn't the maid throw some light on the thing?"

At this both McTavish and the Inspector shook their heads.

"The maid has only been with her some three years. These letters may have been written three years ago, but more probably it is four or five years ago. In any event, the maid came after the return from the sea. There is no mention of anyone being with Lady Wayling. It almost seems that she dismissed whatever staff she had, went down to the sea with the boy, and when he was taken off her she returned home and re-engaged new people."

"Ah, now you're guessing!" commented the Inspector.

"I know. But I'm good at guessing. I suppose you'll want to take charge of these, Inspector?"

"Sure!" said Ipps, his slight American intonation more pronounced as he used that transatlantic idiom.

"I'd like a copy."

"You can have that."

"Will you mention these letters at the inquest?"

"No. Why should I? They are not part of the story of the lady's death, so far. If they turn out to be part of it, any early mention of them would only put somebody on the *qui vive*."

"When is the inquest?"

"To-morrow."

"It won't be the same coroner as the one on Friday?"

"No."

McTavish rose and took a turn about the room.

"Do you know, Inspector, I have a theory that if a murderer doesn't actually return to the scene of his crime, he very often puts in an appearance at the inquest on his victim?"

"Yes, that's very likely."

"You were at the inquest on that other poor wretch?"

"Yes."

"Do you carry in your highly trained official memory the gallery of faces in the well of the coroner's court? I mean, could you remember if the same man or same woman in the audience to-morrow had been at the previous inquest?"

"Yes, most likely. But, don't deceive yourself, Mr. McTavish, there is nothing in that."

"Why not?"

"Because there are always a few of the same people at these affairs. There are morbid persons who make

a habit of attending these things. There are Pressmen, both the staff men and free-lances, the lineage merchants. There are minor officials and note-takers. There are amateur detectives, like your story-book heroes—like yourself, in fact. If I hadn't known that you were interesting yourself in finding the murderer, or murderers, of that fellow, and I saw you to-morrow at Lady Wayling's inquest, I should have thought your own presence suspicious. Similarly, if you hadn't known that I am what I am, and had seen me in the court at both inquests, you'd have thought my interest in the two crimes a little suspicious."

"True, true."

"Well, I'm going to write a report. What do you want to do? Now that Sir Herman Wayling brings you in as his representative you have the run of the house. I can trust you not to interfere with my fellows too much, can't I?"

"Of course you can. You won't mind if we talk to the servants?"

"Not a bit. But be a good fellow, and don't let 'em think they're undergoing another official interrogatory."

"Trust me. I shall be the friend of the family, and nothing more."

The Inspector took the bundle of letters and placed them in the side pocket of his blue coat. He rose and stretched himself, smoothed down his buff-coloured waistcoat, adjusted his spotted bow tie, straightened the silky silver hair, which so added to his ingenuous appearance, and generally comported himself like a man of untroubled leisure reluctant to break up a pleasant conversational trio. His last words before leaving the room were addressed to me.

"I suppose the murders in China are much more straightforward than ours, Mr. Armistead? You'll have an interesting tale to tell when you finish your long leave and go back, if you do go back."

"Now what the devil did he mean by that?" I asked as the door closed behind him.

"You don't yet seem to have fully realized, Armistead, that we've put our innocent necks in danger. You don't suppose, do you, that these fellows who followed us were doing it for fun, or because they were enamoured of the sight of our well-tailored backs? If Ipps or we come within glimpsing distance of the murderers they won't simply throw up their hands and say, 'You've won.' No. They'll close our prying eyes for ever and stop our wagging tongues for us. We are up against something particularly cool and nasty. A man lured to his death in the very heart of the City and a woman garrotted in her bed in this well-guarded quarter of London!"

"And yet you've left that girl alone in the mews!"

"What, little Amy? Bless your heart, lad, they won't garrotte little Amy while we walk the earth unsilenced. Besides, they must know that we aren't worth silencing yet. We've discovered nothing of any real importance. Until we do, we're as useful to them as we can be. From their point of view we are a trio of nuisances helping to muck up whatever trail has been left. But if we do discover anything—we'll be 'for it'. Which brings me to the point raised by dear old Innocent Ipps. Who was the watcher who knew the movements of Wayling and his wife and their household? Was it a watcher inside or outside the house? Was it . . .? Let's go and talk to the butler."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

As we stepped from the library to the hall we encountered a frightened-looking maid carrying a dustpan of some kind and the small paraphernalia of domestic duty. She quite jumped as we emerged.

"Which is Mr. Tollinson's pantry, my dear?" asked McTavish.

"It's down the hall, sir, through the service door and then immediately to your right."

"Thank you."

We followed her directions and passed through the service door.

"Nice-spoken girl, that, for a housemaid," commented my companion.

"Was she? I didn't particularly notice."

"Yes. And quite a stout-hearted girl, I imagine. She was all nerves—as who wouldn't be after last night's happening?—and yet she was going quietly on with her job, dusting the hall just outside the door of the very room where the frightening policemen were talking together."

"You surely don't think . . .?"

McTavish laughed.

"It just shows you how difficult, how awfully difficult, detection is outside the pages of fiction, doesn't it? The conventional detective who stalks about sus-

pecting everybody! Good Lord, it isn't difficult to suspect everybody. The difficulty is to prevent one's self from reading suspicious motives into the most normal action of anybody who happens to have even the remotest connection with the victim or the scene of the crime. This seems to be the butler's pantry."

He knocked at the door, and a voice bade us come in. In we went.

Mr. Tollinson, the butler, was, like the other member of his staff whom we had just encountered, going quietly on with his job. He was standing by the little butler's sink, carefully decanting a bottle. Until he had finished he neither turned his head nor spoke to the intruders. We, for our part, realizing the delicacy of his operation, stood still and silent on his threshold. When he did turn he, too, gave a perceptible start, having expected, no doubt, one of his domestic colleagues.

"Good morning, Mr. Tollinson," said McTavish.

"Good morning, sir."

"A bad business, this."

"Lady Wayling, sir? Terrible, terrible."

"I am a friend of Sir Herman Wayling. He has asked me to take things in hand for him. He naturally doesn't want to be pestered by the police more than can be helped."

The butler gravely inclined his head in affirmation of this very reasonable statement.

"My name is McTavish. This is my friend, Mr. Armistead. We have just had a long and dry talk with the Inspector, and I was wondering, Tollinson, if you could find us . . ."

"Oh, most certainly, sir. Where shall I send . . .?"

"No, no. Don't send it anywhere. If you do, we'll

have the Inspector and his men all round us. If you'll give us the hospitality of your room . . . I know it's an odd thing to ask, but everything's odd this morning. I often think, you know, that your side of the baize door is much more convivial and pleasant than the other."

Tollinson positively glowed at this.

"We always think that, sir, if I may say so. Perhaps you'd step through?"

He opened a door which led from his pantry to his sitting-room, and bowed us through.

"What can I have the pleasure . . .? We have a very good brown sherry, if that isn't too sweet for you . . . or there's a dry sherry, of which Sir Herman is particularly fond . . . or I could mix a cocktail. . . ."

"No cocktails for us, Tollinson. Let us try this brown sherry of yours. If you recommend it, I'm sure it must be worth tasting."

We took station on two old-fashioned, straight-backed chairs. The butler came back from his pantry with a decanter and two glasses.

"Won't you try the rocker, sir?" he asked McTavish.

"No, thank you. You must use the rocker. And you must bring in a third glass. Once through that door, you know, we are your guests and not Sir Herman's—self-invited guests, I'm afraid. We can't drink if our host doesn't drink with us."

"You're very kind, sir. Perhaps I will have a glass. My nerves have been a bit jangled by this affair."

"And no wonder."

McTavish had quite won the friendship and confidence of our temporary host, who returned with a

third glass and poured out the sherry with a gentle, almost loving hand.

"I think I used to have the pleasure of waiting upon you, sir, when I was with Sir Lionel."

"What! Sir Lionel Swete? My grandfather?"

"Yes, sir. That was some years ago. We were both very young, sir, you and I." He raised his glass. "My best respects, gentlemen."

"Good health, Tollinson. Ah, what an excellent sherry! So you were with my grandfather, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I had five years with Sir Lionel. Very useful years to me. Mr. Barry taught me a lot."

"Old Barry! By Jove, I haven't thought about him for years! What became of him when my grandfather died?"

"He went to Lord Laban. Miss Elizabeth, your mother, that is, sir, Mrs. McTavish, was already suited. Your father, of course, didn't keep quite such a big establishment, if I may say so, sir."

"Did you go to Lord Laban with him?"

"No, sir. We parted. I went as second footman to Mrs. Blakeby."

"What? Bessie Blakeby, the actress?"

"Well, she was only what you might call an intermittent actress, sir. Mr. Blakeby was rather prone to bankruptcy, as you might say. Mrs. Blakeby used to take to the stage in moments of stress. It was a peculiar household to be in, but very comfortable, taking one thing with another."

"How long have you been with Sir Herman?"

"About ten years, now, sir."

"You were with him before his marriage, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I was here in his mother's time."

"I suppose this was your first post as butler, eh?"

"It was, sir. And very proud I was to get it. And very proud I've been to keep it. I'm only afraid that this awful business will mean the break-up of Sir Herman's establishment."

"Tell me, Tollinson, what kind of lady was Lady Wayling?"

"Oh, a most charming lady, sir. Delightful. Not at all as temperamental as one might have expected from her origin."

"Her origin?"

"She wasn't English, you know, sir."

"Oh, I see. Pity there has been no family."

"A great pity, sir. I think Lady Wayling felt that. She was very fond of children."

"I suppose she had nephews and nieces who helped to make up for having none of her own?"

"Unfortunately not, sir. Sir Herman has no nephews or nieces, and her people were all in South America. We did use to see a good deal of one little fellow a few years ago. He was her sister's child."

"Really. What became of him?"

"He went back to South America, I believe. Will you try another glass, sir?"

"Shall we, Armistead? I think we ought to. I haven't tasted as good a brown sherry for a long time."

"Ah, I thought you'd like it. And you, sir?"

"I shall certainly have another glass. It's delicious," I said.

"I suppose Lady Wayling was very upset when the little boy went back?"

"Oh, yes, very upset. He was quite a delicate little fellow. I remember one year she took him off to the

seaside. Like a schoolgirl with a younger brother, she seemed, sir."

"Who brought him over?"

"What, from South America? Lady Wayling's sister. A striking woman, that, Mr. McTavish. Quite different from our lady."

"Did the father come with them?"

"No. I don't recall ever seeing anything of him. I have a kind of idea that there'd been some trouble. One doesn't like to eavesdrop, you know, sir, but moving about the house as we do . . ."

"Oh, quite, quite. Tell me, Tollinson, what was that little boy's name?"

"His name, sir? His name? I used to know it very well, but it's queer how one forgets. Oh, yes, I remember. He was called Oliver."

"I wonder if I met his mother, Lady Wayling's sister. Was she a tall, dark woman, with rather full lips—a Mrs. Murcia?"

"No, that must have been somebody else. Lady Wayling's sister was small. She *was* dark, of course—dark skinned, and with very dark eyes. She was a Mrs. Fadrique."

"How came it that Lady Wayling took the boy to the seaside, and not his mother?"

"Mrs. Fadrique left him here, sir, for the whole of that summer. She returned to South America."

"It makes a great difference, having a child about the house," said McTavish with surprising sententiousness.

"It does, sir. We missed the little fellow."

"Sir Herman and Lady Wayling would be sorry to part with him, I suppose."

"Oh, very, sir. I don't think I've ever seen Lady

Wayling so cut-up about anything. I fancy it was because the little chap was such a delicate little fellow. She didn't expect to see him again. I never think that Lady Wayling was very fond of her own country, if I might presume to judge her feelings about such a thing. She never talked of it, never expressed any wish in my hearing to return to it."

"I expect you had plenty of her own countrymen as guests here."

"No, sir. Not very many. Very few, in fact. And some of those were not really her friends, when I come to think of it. They were what we call the formals."

"The formals?"

"Yes, sir. People who come to our big dinners and receptions, diplomatic and political people for the most part. Not the people who come to our smaller, family affairs, if you understand what I mean, sir?"

"Yes, I understand. Well, thanks very much for the sherry and the use of your snug little room, Tollinson."

"Not at all, sir. Very kind of you to prefer to take it here."

We passed out again, and through the service door into the hall. Sir Herman was just removing his greatcoat with the assistance of a younger man-servant. At the sight of his haggard and weary face, his bent shoulders, and the general air of tragic dejection which he bore, I realized acutely how horrible was the thing which had smitten him so suddenly. Something of this renewed acute realization of the tragedy must have possessed McTavish also at that moment, for his face was grim and seemed thrust even more forward on the lean neck than usual.

"I hate to put him to the question again, now, Armistead, but I fear there's no help for it. We must know exactly what part the man Fadrique has played in Lady Wayling's life. She must have incurred somebody's enmity over that small boy, and these Latin-Americans have devilishly long memories. He's going into the library. Let us follow him."

Sir Herman, as McTavish spoke, opened the library door and entered, closing the door behind him. We walked down the hall and followed him. I held the door open for my friend to enter, and he, too, passed in. My attention was caught for a moment by the sight of the maid whom we had last seen with her dusting-pan. She was standing at the foot of the stairs, this time with a feather-duster in her hand, ostensibly dusting the two lamp standards at the foot of the broad balustrade, but actually watching us with wide eyes. I returned her gaze for a second or two, and then recalled McTavish's joke with Innocent Ipps: that all domestics suspect the police of wanting to find an "arrest" at any cost. The girl was, no doubt, only fascinated by the sight of us because she connected us with the machinery of justice.

I, too, stepped into the library, expecting to find McTavish and Wayling in conversation. To my amazement, McTavish was not in the room, and Sir Herman Wayling lay stretched over the big table-desk in its centre.

CHAPTER TWENTY

So like was the posture of this prone man to that of the dead man in Bishopsgate that I feared that the garrotter had found his third victim. But I saw at a glance that Sir Herman's throat was unscarred, and realized that in the few minutes which it had taken McTavish and me to traverse the hall, no garrotter could have done his work. Wayling could only have been knocked out by some swift blow, sudden enough to prevent his raising any alarm.

But where was McTavish? I had not stood for more than a minute—if that—looking at the staring housemaid, yet in that minute my heavy and slow-moving friend had apparently been swallowed up into nothingness. I abandoned my instinctive first interest in the inert figure lying across the table, and glanced hastily round the long room. There was a second door, somewhere, it was evident.

Once expected, the second door was not hard to detect. It stood between two sections of wall-shelving, and was not only not concealed but was even conspicuous, for it had a patent self-closing apparatus affixed to it.

I left Wayling to come to his senses and opened this second door. It led directly into a small closet of a room, furnished like an office. This, in some previous

tenancy, had evidently been a librarian's or secretary's room. From it yet another door led into the hall. As I passed through this, I found myself but a few feet from the service door through which McTavish and I had recently returned to the front of the house. Through that, I knew, was the labyrinth of passages and service staircases which was characteristic of the great houses of the period at which this house had been built.

As I paused, wondering whether to turn through the service door or to go back down the hall, there to question either the girl at the foot of the stairs or the constable on duty at the door, I noticed that the stairs themselves were undermined, as it were, by a very narrow and dark passageway. The staircase rose from the middle of the wide hall and, from the point where the stairs themselves reached its floor level to where the service door stood, the apparent hall was not the breadth of the full hall minus the width of the staircase. There was evidently a narrow hallway on the far side of the staircase with, probably, another service door leading from it. It was to connect these two narrower hallways that the little passage had been allowed to run under the rise of the stairs.

McTavish—assuming that he, too, had passed from the library the way I had come—might have turned left through the service door, right down the hall, or gone forward along this small passage which was under the dark of the stairs, to the other side of the split hall, there to turn either right or left.

My indecision was ended by his reappearance through the servant's door on my left.

He gripped my arm.

"Is he all right?" he asked.

"I don't know. I didn't wait to see. I followed you."

With a swifter movement than I could have given him credit for making, McTavish dashed back through the door into the librarian's room, I following him. A few quick strides brought us again into the library, where Wayling still lay prostrate.

McTavish felt the dangling left wrist.

"He's alive, thank God! I thought at first he'd been really and finally outed. What quick work it must have been! By George, Armistead, the man who knocked him out must be an artist. He wasn't alone in the room more than a moment, and with every fear of someone stepping in after him—as we did step in. There's an audacity about this that pleases me."

"What happened, do you think?"

"What happened? Why, man, isn't it obvious? Wayling walked into the room, not specially alert—you saw as he took off his coat how dejected and preoccupied he was—and someone who was waiting for him in the shadow of this break in the bookcasing promptly knocked him out."

"But why?"

"To shut his mouth, probably. To prevent anyone questioning him for a while. As soon as the door opened to admit us the assailant simply left by this door in the wall. I came in, saw him stretched there, and just caught the door closing to. Of course, the fellow had bounded through, letting the door swing behind him. By the time I was through it, he was well out of the other door of that damned little room, and once in the hall he was more or less safe. I guessed that he had either doubled left, into Tollinson's quarters, or bolted through the passage under the stairs.

I chose left—and was wrong, or, if I wasn't wrong, he had lost himself in those kitchen and scullery passages before I overtook him. All I saw was the Innocent sauntering along to Tollinson's room, probably to ask him what we'd been talking about. It struck me as soon as I saw that broad back what a mess we were in."

"We ?"

"Yes. Dammit ! Think, man. Here are we, the two people who 'found' the first fellow, calmly finding another man knocked out. Who'd believe it ?"

"But, McTavish, Wayling being knocked out in this way means that the murderer is still on the premises—Lady Wayling's murderer !"

"I know it does—or he was, until a few minutes ago. He's probably gone clean away by now, after his last few crowded and exciting minutes."

"But why didn't the police find him when they went after the fellow this morning ? Surely they searched the house ?"

"Yes. They'd search the house all right. Have you ever tried to search a house like this ? You'd need a ferret at every bolt-hole, and they hadn't that. The fellow probably played hide-and-seek with them, and then emerged at the right moment."

He was still holding Wayling's wrist.

"What are we going to do ?" I asked.

"Do ? You're going off, *tout suite*, for some whisky or brandy, for poor Sir Herman, who has fainted after the strain of the past twelve hours. . . ."

"But aren't you going to tell Ipps about his being knocked out ?"

"No. I'm going to condone the felony. I tell you, the poor fellow has fainted—and who could wonder ?"

"But won't he remember?"

"Look here, Armistead, have *you* ever been knocked out?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Well, I have. And I can assure you that after a straight left to the point of the jaw you remember nothing about the few minutes preceding it. Now, off you go. I tell you, the poor fellow wants whisky. I'll stay here and chafe his hands."

"But, McTavish . . ."

"By Gad, Armistead, you will be knocked out if you don't obey orders. Off you go, and bring back the spirit—brandy or whisky, it doesn't matter which. That footman fellow in the hall will get it."

I had already seen enough of McTavish, and felt enough of his magnetism, to be amenable to his will. Without further bidding, I turned and strode over to the main door of the library. Barely had I reached it when I heard the immemorial formula of the Force uttered in a soft, mellow tenor, with just a trace of American accent.

"Now, then, what's all this?"

Inspector Ipps had come quietly through the door in the wall and was surveying McTavish with an astonishment in his gaze that was even more child-like and innocent than usual.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I THOUGHT it best not to stay my errand, and passed out of the room. The young housemaid was talking now to the footman. I grabbed his arm.

"Get some brandy, or whisky, or something. Sir Herman has fainted."

My words galvanized the fellow into quick life. He turned and positively shot down the hall. Without even a look at the girl, I returned to the library.

"Fainted, has he? You don't say?" I heard Ipps remarking. "Well, I'm not surprised."

"Ah, he's coming to now," replied McTavish.

They chafed his hands. In a moment the young footman was back with the brandy, which Ipps administered like a trained nurse. Sir Herman opened his eyes and groaned. Ipps and McTavish raised him from where he lay, and he came groggily to his feet.

"Don't you worry, Sir Herman," said Ipps, soothingly; "you've had a bit of a faint. That's all."

Wayling's consciousness was flooding back. The events of the night and morning quite obviously returned to him.

"Oh, my God!" he said.

"Get him to bed," said the official detective to the servant. "I'll help you upstairs with him." He turned to McTavish. "We shan't be able to worry him for

a few hours. I'll turn the doctor on to him. It's a nuisance. I wanted to have a talk with him."

"So did I."

"Well, our talks will have to wait. Now, Sir Herman, drink the rest of this, and then let us help you upstairs. You need a rest."

"A rest? I can't rest." His pince-nez were swinging by their cord. He fumbled for them with the helpless gestures of a baby unable to direct its own hands. "Perhaps you're right. I will rest." He leaned heavily on the servant's shoulder. Ipps supported his other arm, and the three of them passed from the room.

"What now?" I asked when they had disappeared.

"They say that the most astute criminal will give himself away from over-eagerness. I wonder if that is true?" He made the statement and asked the question more to himself than to me. "What next, did you say, Armistead, what next? Why, we must get from some other source the information that Wayling can't give us."

"You mean about Mrs. Fadrique?"

"Certainly."

"What other source?"

"The nearest."

He stepped over and rang a bell. When it was answered he sent for Lady Wayling's maid. Theresa Riggs came slowly into the room, as if she did not relish a third cross-examination.

She seemed relieved to find that the official police were not with us.

"Tell me, Theresa, who was your mistress's best friend?"

The maid thought for a moment.

"I should think the Countess of Duffield, sir."

"The Countess of Duffield, eh?"

"Yes, sir. She and Lady Wayling saw a good deal of each other."

"That's all I wanted, thank you."

"Thank you, sir."

She bowed her head and withdrew.

"Is there a *Who's Who* in this alleged library?"

I looked about, and found one on Lady Wayling's own desk. McTavish opened it and found Lord Duffield's address.

"Umm. About ten minutes' walk. Well, I'm not too fond of walking as a rule, but a breath of fresh air will do us good."

"You're going to call on her?"

"Most certainly. And so are you."

In the hall, as we were donning our hats and coats, he beckoned to the police officer who was stationed there.

"Tell Inspector Ipps that I didn't think it worth while to wait, but that I'll look back later in the day, when Sir Herman is rested."

"Very good, sir."

"Good morning."

"Good morning, sir."

"Oh, by the way, how do we go from here to Regent's Park?"

"Your best way will be by Underground, sir. The nearest station to here will be Down Street."

"Oh, yes. That'll be better than taking a bus, will it?"

"Much better, sir."

"Thank you."

"Are we going to Regent's Park? That's more than a ten-minute walk."

"Much more. No, my dear fellow, we are going nowhere near Regent's Park. But if anyone asks where we are, that's what that fool of a policeman will tell 'em. And if Innocent Ipps wants to check up on us, that's what the policeman will tell him. Actually we are going out of our way now, but we'd better make a demonstration in force towards Down Street. What we will do is to take the train from Down Street to Dover Street. It's only a minute's run, and as both Down Street and Dover Street will be deserted at this time of the day we shall be able to see if anyone is following us."

If the two station platforms were to be trusted, nobody was following us. It was about a quarter of an hour later that we turned into the old square where Lord Duffield's town house stood. McTavish did not trouble to ask if Lady Duffield were at home. He announced authoritatively to the servant that he wished to see her.

"I will ask if she is——"

"Then she is in. Take this card to her, please. We shall wait in the hall." He scribbled a line on the pasteboard.

The man gave way before his authority.

"She's probably said that she's too upset to see anyone," McTavish explained to me as we sat together on an old settle, waiting the man's return, while another servant glowered at us from the door, which had been closed behind us. He probably thought McTavish was a visiting dissenting parson and that I was the leader of his Sunday School.

The line on the visiting-card had had its effect. We were asked to step upstairs to Lady Duffield's room. The servant merely announced us as "the

gentlemen", as if he doubted the truth of his own words.

Lady Duffield stood in the centre of the room, the pasteboard between her fingers. I have rarely seen so attractive a woman. She was as slender as a willow wand, with a small head proudly set on her slim white throat and neck. Her dark hair was dressed low on her forehead, almost meeting in its sweep the two level brows which were like lines of Indian ink above the round grey eyes. It was not merely her slenderness which made her seem tall, for she had unusual height for a woman. As I looked on her I recalled having seen her portrait many times in those illustrated papers which are such a boon to Englishmen exiled from their kind in foreign stations, as I had been.

"You wished to see me about . . ." Her voice broke, as if she could not bring herself to speak her dead friend's name to strangers.

"About Lady Wayling's terrible death—yes," said McTavish.

"Have you—have you seen her ?"

McTavish nodded his great head.

"Is she—is she very terrible ?"

"She is not much disfigured."

Lady Duffield sighed with relief.

"Won't you sit down ?"

"Thank you. Lady Duffield, would you answer a few questions for me about Lady Wayling ?"

"Are you acting for the police ?"

"No. For Sir Herman."

She, too, found a chair.

"What is it you wish to know ?"

"First, have you any idea, any suspicion, even the vaguest, as to who may have done this thing ?"

She paused before she answered, as if she searched her memory.

"No. None."

"You have known Lady Wayling for some years ?"

"Ever since she came to England."

"Not before."

"No, we had never met before. I used to hear of her in Paris."

"Hers was a thoroughly happy marriage, was it not ?"

"Thoroughly happy. Happier than anyone ever expected it to be, I think. Idyllic in its happiness."

"Did Lady Wayling ever speak to you of her girlhood and her home life before she came to England ?"

"Yes, often."

"That, too, was happy ?"

"Yes, in its own way, I suppose it was happy."

"What do you mean, precisely, by 'in its own way' ?"

"Well, life in Cuba is very different, you know. At least, it is in the part of Cuba from which she came."

"You mean, more wild ?"

"Yes, and no. More passionate, certainly, but in some ways stricter. Girls are not allowed quite as much liberty as we are allowed in Europe."

"And young Lola wanted to break through the restraints ?"

"She wanted to, and she did. That was how she came to be dancing in Paris."

"I see. She quarrelled with her family ?"

"With all except her sister."

"Mrs. Fadrique ?"

"Yes. Do you know her ?"

"No. But I have heard of her. She was the mother of that charming little boy, Oliver, who stayed with the Waylings."

"Yes, that was she. She was very different from Lola, but very attractive."

"Where is she now ?"

"In Cuba, I expect. I always understood that she went back there. She and Lola had some slight difference about the boy eventually."

"Is he still alive ?"

"What, Oliver ? Yes, I think so."

"What can you tell me of Mr. Fadrique ?"

"Nothing at all. Lola very rarely mentioned him."

"But you think there was such a person ? He wasn't a tactful fiction ?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I have often thought he might be. Lola's sister was just the type of woman to have a small boy with a mythical father."

"What was her name—her Christian name ?"

"Isabella. She was called after the Queen of Spain —the old Queen. They are a Spanish family, you know."

"Isabella, eh ? Isabella."

He rose from his chair and paced the room for a moment, his queer cape flapping about his bent and sloping shoulders. Lady Duffield watched him with wide eyes.

"You don't think, do you, that Isabella had anything to do with this terrible business ?"

"No. I don't think that. But I wish I knew how serious was the difference between them about the little boy. There is no doubt that it was the sister's little boy ?"

"Whose could he have been, if not hers? Oh, you mean . . ." Her face mounted an angry red, but McTavish was quick to appease her.

"I meant that he might belong to somebody in Cuba. If you thought I was hinting that he was Lady Wayling's child, you were wrong. Her age alone——"

"Of course, how stupid of me. But would her age . . .?"

I realized then how verbally skilful had been her questioner's disclaimer. He had set Lady Duffield's brain working on the possibility he had just denied and drew from her the very suggestion which in implication she had resented.

"Her age wouldn't have prevented her from being Oliver's mother. Girls mature very early out there, from such stock as hers. Do you really think . . . but you can't . . . it's preposterous."

He did not pursue the subject.

"She never, I suppose, expressed any worry as to her safety?"

"Never."

"Or that of her husband?"

"No."

"In your friendship with her did she ever give you any cause, even the slightest, to think that she was afraid of anything? I don't now mean afraid of being attacked, but afraid of something from her past coming up again to disturb her happiness."

"I don't think she ever did."

"Not even about her old suitors? About the Prince?"

"Ah, then you know about the Prince?"

"Not really. Tell me."

"There's nothing to tell. He wanted her to be his

morganatic wife. She refused. He was strictly honourable, but there had been some jest that he would snatch her away when he wanted her—some laughing nonsense. The nearest he ever came to snatching her was when he danced a quadrille with her in this very house, just before his own marriage. He is a most gentle soul, really. The Slavonian Royal house are all that way, more like professors than princes."

"And yet amorous, eh ? Well, even a professor may do strange things for love. I was once nearly a professor myself. I might have become one, had I been a little more or a little less amorous. Who can say what a man will do if he has the temperament of a professor and the rank of a prince ? Well, we need trouble you no more, Lady Duffield."

"Will they catch the murderer ?"

"One never can tell. We all hope so."

"How is Herman ?"

"Naturally very upset."

"Yes, he worshipped her."

McTavish was standing by an occasional table. He picked up a photograph framed in heavy silver as he spoke.

"This surely is he ?"

She crossed hurriedly to his side and took the thing from him.

"Oh, yes. That was taken when we were doing private theatricals one year. I keep it there, but I am really a little ashamed of it. It is he and I as Ernest and Mary in 'The Admirable Crichton'."

"It is very charming of you. That Robinson Crusoe rig suits you."

"I know." She blushed charmingly.

"I shouldn't have thought Wayling a good actor."

"He's a much better actor than you'd think. He's a slow study, but a sound performer. He was wonderful as Ernest."

Her mind had left the tragedy we had come to discuss with her and had gone back to the happier past.

"Lola was Tweeny," she said, and at the mention of the name remembered everything. "Oh, poor Lola, poor Lola. . . ."

Her eyes, already reddened with weeping, filled again with tears. Her delicate hands were clenched in her effort to still her emotion. McTavish flung up his hands in a gesture of despair, and without any formal farewell we left her. As I closed the door behind us I heard her give way to a burst of passionate sobbing.

It would be an understatement to say merely that I was affected by her grief, for I was deeply moved. McTavish, however, seemed to have turned suddenly cynical.

"Amateur acting plays the devil with one's sincerity, doesn't it ? Listen to those sobs. How often we have heard them from the distressed heroine, Armistead ! How rarely one hears them from genuine distress."

"But, McTavish, she is——"

"Yes, I know. She is greatly upset. She may well be. The wife of her friend is dead."

"You mean, her friend is dead."

"I mean exactly what I say. Did you notice how ready she was to try to persuade herself and me that, after all, the boy might have been Lady Wayling's illegitimate son ? And how ready she was to forget all about Lady Wayling when I picked up that photograph and led her to speak of her damned play-acting.

She's a lovely woman, Armistead, but heartless, as lovely women usually are."

"Are they?" I said, amazed by this sweeping generalization.

"Yes, heartless and jealous. I wouldn't like a sister of mine to marry the lover of a woman like that."

"You do her an injustice," I cried hotly, for she had captured both my admiration and my sympathy.

We had reached the hall of Lady Duffield's house, and a servant was bowing us out. McTavish waited until we were out of earshot.

"If I do her an injustice now, Armistead," he said, in that slow, measured voice of his, "she shall have ample justice later."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

We must almost have reached the door of our own house before I came out of my reverie and questioned McTavish abruptly.

"Why didn't you ask Lady Duffield where it was that Lady Wayling stayed with the little boy? Why didn't we ask her maid that?"

"Her maid wouldn't have known. It was one of the first questions I meant to ask Lady Duffield—and I was afraid."

"Afraid—you!"

"Yes."

"Afraid of what?"

"That she might lie."

"That she might lie? Why should you be afraid of that?"

"For the same reason that I was afraid to tell the Inspector that we had found Wayling knocked out over his own desk."

"I don't follow. . . ."

"You admit, don't you, that we are at present on a wild-goose chase? Well, I don't want to be distracted by even wilder geese. If Ipps had been told of how we found Wayling, we might have found our movements not only followed but actually impeded. If Lady Duffield had lied to us about the place where

her friend stayed that summer, we might have wasted days exploring it for someone who could tell us about the boy. So I didn't ask her."

"Then our visit to her was wasted ?"

"No. She told us quite a lot."

"Do you see any light at all ?"

"Precious little. It seems evident that whoever killed Cock Robin on Friday also killed Lola Wayling, but who that was, or why he committed a double murder, one can only guess."

"We know it was a Cuban."

"Do we ? How ?"

"The garrotting."

"My dear Armistead ! If I found you with an arrow in your heart would I be justified in deducing that you had been killed by a Red Indian ?"

"You would, if it were known that I had spent my youth on an Indian reservation, and that I had had a family quarrel with somebody about an Indian boy."

"Ah ! And if I happened to know that you had been expelled from Eton and then found you dead with an Eton collar on, would I be justified in deducing that you had been killed by the Provost ?"

"That is absurd. It wouldn't be on all fours."

"No. It wouldn't. I apologize. The presumption is, as you say, that these murders were done by a Cuban. There is at least a fair presumption that the motive was hatred rather than gain, was revenge rather than security."

"Security ?"

"Most murders are committed for one of a very few motives—lust, greed, jealousy, or security. By security one means security from some retribution which the murdered person might invoke. Security from black-

mail is a very common object of the murderer, or would-be murderer. Security from exposure to the law is even more common. In the case of Lady Wayling the murderer can have had little or nothing to gain in the concrete and tangible sense.

"A death engineered with so little margin of time, and followed by no looting of the possessions of the victim was hardly a murder for gain. We are told on all hands that Lady Wayling was happily married, and there is no indication of a suitor whose lust or jealousy would have prompted him to such a crime. Lady Wayling was a popular figure in her set, I gather, but I have heard of no importunate lover who could have aroused Wayling to murder his wife."

"Wayling hasn't the savour of a murderer, either," I hazarded.

"Few murderers have, my dear fellow. Crippen, I recall, was a mild, harmless little man, rather like that little fellow in Strube's cartoons. Bywaters was a clean enough looking lad, and Edith Thompson was as commonplace a suburban wife as you'd wish to meet. Armstrong, the poisoner, was not in the least sinister, and Mahon, who carved that wretched girl to pieces, was the reverse of murderous in looks—so much the reverse that all kinds of women had trusted him.

"The last murderer I saw condemned to death, by Macardie on Assize, was a young Yorkshire operative who was a Territorial. He kept back a cartridge after range practice and used it to shoot his young wife, with whom he had quarrelled. If you had met him in a Leeds or Bradford street you would never have suspected him to be a potential murderer. No, that fact, which I admit, that Wayling hasn't the savour of a murderer, means exactly nothing."

"Why shouldn't these two murders have been committed from motives of security?"

"Security from what? Detection? Suppose that Wayling thought his wife to be about to discover that he had for long indulged in some vulgar intrigue with another woman. He might have murdered her, but why should he have murdered the visiting Cuban? Suppose that the visiting Cuban were about to expose something in the past of Lady Wayling, why should someone first murder him and then murder her?"

"Let us instead suppose, since we are supposing," I said, "that whatever the visiting Cuban had to tell Lady Wayling would have thrown somebody into jeopardy."

"Why should the somebody kill her? Having killed him their object would have been accomplished."

"There is the other theory."

"What other theory?"

"That the murderers were not the same. That the visiting Cuban was killed by one party to some feud, and she was killed by the other party, in revenge for his death."

"Yes, I've played with that, but it is hardly a strong enough surmise to help us. The position is extraordinarily difficult. I said the other day, you remember, that a commonplace murder without motive would be almost impossible to detect, except by accident. Here we have two murders, and in each case the motive is so external to anything known of the victims that it gives us no starting-point. In the case of the dead man in Bishopsgate we have yet to discover who or what he was, and why he came to England.

"In the case of the dead lady we are confronted by an initial mystery, how anybody knew that at that very

hour she would be in her bedroom, that Wayling would be out but expected home, and that nobody was waiting up for him. At first blush, we must admit that things look black for him. And after what we have just learnt they look blacker. A man who is so good an actor that he can look such a slow-witted and stupid fellow can hardly be trusted, can he ?"

"But he doesn't merely look a slow-witted and stupid fellow ; he is a slow-witted and stupid fellow."

"Quick enough and intelligent enough to have been the close friend of Lady Duffield and her set, and to have given a distinctive performance in a Barrie part amongst amateurs whose standard is high. But, even so, what could have been his motive ? As I have just said, there might conceivably be a motive for murdering his wife, but not for murdering the other one. Again, if the visiting Cuban had been a threat or a menace to Wayling—say he was known either as the actual or potential lover of Lady Wayling—how came Wayling to know of his arrival? How came he to lure the man to that basement ? By what means did he kill him ? And, having killed him, why did he kill the woman, too ? No. I see no light at all from the angle of a supposition that Wayling is guilty. We are still thrown back to a person or persons unknown."

"Perhaps the inquest on Lady Wayling will give us some clue or throw some light."

"Yes. And perhaps it won't. It would be interesting to know how much is known to Ipps that we don't know. But here we are. A bite of lunch won't be amiss, Armistead."

He opened the door with his latchkey and we entered the converted mews that had so oddly become my temporary home. Amy Renton was curled up in a

chair reading one of the detective stories of "Alfred Bruce".

"Well ?" she cried. "What have you done ?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all, of any great importance. What have you done ?" replied McTavish, looking more than ever avuncular as he playfully pulled her red hair.

"I've had a busy morning. I've been entertaining Mr. Ipps."

"The devil you have !"

"Yes, I have. He forgot his cigarette-papers at breakfast-time and came round to get them."

McTavish threw his cape and hat carelessly over the nearest chair. I, with my temperamental faddiness, picked them up and took them into the hall.

"How long have we been away from Ipps ?" asked McTavish, turning to me as I re-entered the room.

"Oh, not very long. We walked to the Tube, took the train to the next station, then walked to Duffield's house. We didn't stay there very long, and we have walked leisurely back. Say an hour or an hour and a half all told."

"Yes. Then the Innocent must have shot round here as soon as we were safely away from Wayling's place. Did you show him over the house, Amy ?"

"Yes. He said he'd often wondered how they'd modernized these old groom's dwelling-rooms. We didn't disturb anything."

"No. Of course you wouldn't. Did he look out of our back windows ?"

"Yes, for quite a long time."

"What did he say ?"

"I don't think he said anything very much."

"Why should he look out of our back windows ?" I asked.

"Because they overlook Hardy Street and the back of Wayling's place."

"Do they ? I hadn't noticed that."

"He didn't touch anything in the rooms, did he ?"

"He was very interested in your photographs and books."

"Did he meddle with my wardrobe ?"

"He did ask how one managed about storing clothes and so on."

"What did you say ?"

"I said that in your case it wasn't much of a problem, as you were rather careless about your dress." She blushed at so frankly speaking of one of her host's idiosyncrasies.

McTavish rose and passed into the bedroom. We heard him rummaging about for a moment or two, and then he returned. I thought, though I may have been mistaken, that he was a shade less intense in his voice and manner.

"Was he pleasant to you ? I hope you flirted with him in the modern manner, all daring and diplomacy and no real danger."

"No. We didn't flirt. Inspector Ipps is far too fatherly for a flirtation. He asked a good deal about me, and my home and my plans."

"And what you do for me in your brand-new job, eh ?"

"Well, naturally, we talked a lot about you. But I was very careful."

"Careful ! Bless you, you needn't have been careful. *I've* no hidden life of which to be ashamed. Now, Armistead here . . ."

They both laughed, but I was unruffled. I had been

too often chaffed about my staid manner and habits to worry at being the friendly butt of my friends.

"He spoke a good deal of Mr. Armistead, too."

"Did he ?" said McTavish. "And what did you tell him ?"

This time her banter was more vigorous and direct.

"Oh, I said that Mr. Armistead was a dear."

"Steady on. You're making him blush. These strong, silent men from the Orient don't understand such easy-going tributes to their charm. What did he say about Armistead ?"

"He asked me if Mr. Armistead talked much of his experiences in China."

"And you said . . . ?"

"I told the truth." She glanced over to me with a certain mischief dancing in her eyes. She was lighter in spirits to-day than I had known her since our strange, dramatic encounter on the Friday. "I told the exact and unvarnished truth."

"Which was ?"

"That Mr. Armistead doesn't talk much about anything."

"What did he say to that ?"

"He asked me how long Mr. Armistead had been in the accounting department of the Chinese Customs Service."

"Of course, you didn't know. He seems to be taking a keen interest in you, Armistead. By the way, how long *have* you been in the Chinese Customs Service, Armistead ?"

His repetition of my name gave to his query just the right note of satire, but I was aware that both he and Amy Renton waited for my answer with more than a merely satirical interest.

"Not very long, as lives go," I said, something, I know not what, warning me to be reticent.

"Inspector Ipps said he'd like a quiet talk with Mr. Armistead some time," said Amy.

"With me ? Whatever for ?"

"I dunno—but he said it," she replied.

"He wants to pump you. You'd better contrive a talk with him," said McTavish.

"But——"

"But me no buts. What did you say, Amy ?"

"I said I was sure Mr. Armistead was always accessible."

"Of course he is. Did Ipps seem satisfied with the progress of his case ?"

"He didn't seem very cheerful about it. He said that he had a number of clues, but that they led to nothing tangible."

"Did he speak at all of the man you found for him ?"

"Oh, yes. I forgot to tell you that. Inspector Ipps has had a message about that man's movements."

McTavish showed a new interest. When the talk had turned to me and to the Inspector's new interest in me, McTavish had dropped into his familiar mood of easy nonsense, but now he was alert again, his face set in tight lines about his mouth.

"What was the message ?"

"It seems the Cuban was seen dining at the station restaurant. A waiter there has recognized a photograph."

"He's been a little slow, surely. The photographs were circulated on Saturday."

"This man had had a week-end off."

"What does he say of the man ?"

"He remembers him partly because he overheard him talking of his voyage from Cuba."

"He overheard him talking of his voyage from Cuba, did he? Then the murdered man had a companion?"

"Not exactly a companion. He shared a table with another customer."

"Is there a description available of this other?"

"No. Inspector Ipps seemed rather annoyed about that. All the waiter said was that the man in the photograph shared a table with another customer, and when he was asked to describe the other customer he said he didn't particularly remember him, except that he was a big man."

"That's little enough to go on."

"It isn't much, is it? But one of the other waiters says he remembers that table being occupied about that time, just before seven o'clock, and thinks the first man who occupied it was a clergyman. They get a lot of clergymen in that restaurant, it seems, coming in off the Cambridge and Ely trains."

McTavish sat silent for a moment.

"Was Ipps excited about this news?" he asked.

"No," said Amy, "I don't think he was, very. I think he was a little disappointed about it. He asked me to tell you, and I forgot when you asked me what he had been doing here. Do you think it is much of a clue?"

"No, I don't. We knew before that the dead man had had a meal shortly before he was killed. Where he had it doesn't much matter. With whom he had it might have mattered enormously, if only we were sure that his dining companion was someone known to him, that the meal was a prearranged meeting. As it is, it

seems as if the Cuban had really dined alone, and had merely been drawn into conversation over the table with some stranger. After all, it would be a most natural thing, particularly if the other diner were really a parson. Parsons are the very devil for forcing their conversation on to strangers. Ipps didn't, I suppose, discover if the two men left the restaurant together?"

"He didn't say. He asked me if I had dined before finding the man in the basement, and I said no, but that you and Mr. Armistead and I had dined together afterwards."

"Ah!"

"Yes—and he asked me if you had a good appetite, which struck me as a funny thing to ask."

"What did you say?"

"I said that I didn't think we had any of us a very ravenous appetite after seeing that throttled corpse."

"Good! I think I'll return to Wayling's house and have another talk with Innocent Ipps. Luncheon can wait for half an hour."

He looked round the room.

"Hello, where's my coat?"

"I put it in the hall for you."

"Ah, a tidy lad, this, Amy."

We moved into the hall together, he and I.

"Why did Ipps come back here, do you think?" I asked him.

"Because Ipps isn't one half so innocent as he looks. He's playing a very good game at the moment, a very good game. I've every respect for Ipps. You noticed his interest in my appetite?"

"Yes. But I didn't quite see the point."

"Why, my dear fellow, it was obvious. Ipps is

under the impression that I may have dined twice on Friday night."

"But why . . . ?"

McTavish had slipped into his old-fashioned caped coat and had put on the round black hat. He glanced at his reflection in the hall mirror with a grimace.

"I look rather like a big clergyman myself in these things, you know, and that afternoon I happened to have come in from Cambridge. Ipps can't understand the detached interest of the amateur in a crime. And I'm not sure that he isn't right."

And with that odd remark he went out.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE more I saw of Amy Renton the more I liked her. Not only was she physically attractive, with her milk-white skin and her Titian hair, her trim figure and her pleasant movements, but she was mentally attractive also. Although she had had a very modern education, and must, indeed, from her origins, have been something of a "swot" to take her succession of scholarships from the local prep. school to the University, she was by no means a blue-stocking, nor had she that supercilious air of self-complacency which too often mars the over-educated girl. There were times when she was as ingenuous as a village shopgirl, and she had an air occasionally of being as sweetly innocent as any milkmaid of an old-fashioned romance.

When McTavish went out Amy and I sat talking, waiting for his return. She had arranged a cold lunch from a nearby provision shop where they sold ready-cooked fowls and ready-prepared potato salads. A chicken, two kinds of salad, some table ale in huge bottles, a cherry *flan*, and a round box of crustless cheese were the courses to which her amateur housekeeping invited us. Laid out on white napery they made a tempting meal.

"There was something I didn't tell Mr. McTavish," she said, "because I thought it might worry him."

"What was it ?"

"The Inspector took away a photograph."

"The deuce he did! Did he ask for it and then bind you to silence?"

"No. He merely snooped it when he thought I wasn't looking."

"What kind of a photograph was it?"

"One of these groups from the mantel. I suppose he thought one wouldn't be missed from this welter. It was rather like a bit out of a detective novel. I wondered what he'd come back for, because I didn't believe he'd have come for a half-empty packet of cigarette-papers. That seemed an obvious excuse. And yet I couldn't very well hang about at his heels as if I suspected him of wanting to lift the cake knives. So I left this door open and went into the hall. If you stand with your back to this wall, you can just see into the room through the mirror there. It was then that I saw him snoop the photograph."

"McTavish thinks that Ipps suspects him of having had a hand in these murders."

"He thinks that, does he?"

I told her of what he had said to me a moment before. Her brow was very troubled.

"Of course, it does look a bit queer, once you get it into your mind."

"What looks queer?"

"Mr. McTavish's conduct."

"Does it?"

"You know it does. You are like me, you've so grown to like him that you can't admit that he may be a villain."

"A villain!" I smiled at her old-fashioned word.

"A wrong 'un, a murderer," she amended it.

"I don't believe he is," I said, "and if I did I wouldn't

be living in these rooms with him, nor allowing you to be associated with him."

"If it comes to that," she said, "how do you know that I'm not implicated myself? And how do I know that you are not implicated?"

I pooh-poohed such preposterous suggestions, but she was very earnest.

"No. I mean it. I'm just trying to see things from the Ipps standpoint. What Ipps thinks, you know, is that Mr. McTavish's presence at that spot at that moment was by no means as accidental as it seemed. Murderers notoriously return to the scene of the crime, don't they?"

"Do they? I don't know. I've never been a murderer."

"Please don't laugh. It's no laughing matter. You see, when Mr. McTavish says he'd just come in from Cambridge, and when we know that the dead man spoke in the station restaurant to a big man who looked something like a clergyman, and when we find Mr. McTavish telling Inspector Ipps that there'll be another murder just before someone is killed within a few yards of this place, the thing does look black against him, doesn't it? And when he went to some trouble to attach to himself the two people who really had innocent motives for being just by where the body was found——"

"But, Amy, you forget the two other features of these murders. What motive had McTavish for killing a strange Cuban and for garrotting Lady Wayling? And how did he garrott them? He can't have carried a garrotting machine about all day at Cambridge, and I swear that he couldn't buy one there."

"I don't think motive would present much of a difficulty," she said thoughtfully.

"Don't you ? What motive do you suggest . . . ?"

"Well, Mr. McTavish is a little eccentric, isn't he ?"

"Is he ?"

"He was a Don of Cardinal's, with a reputation in his own subject already established and a great academic future before him. He jacked that all up. He was a private in the War, and you told me yourself that he spent most of his time as an orderly man because he was so queer they daren't trust him on parade until they went into the line. He came home a fter behaving like a detonator at the Peace Conference and began to edit a children's newspaper. He has a large private income and has refused to live on it. He has written some very gory detective tales—I've just been reading one—and he keeps some queer books on his shelves, books on morbid psychology and such subjects——"

"But, my dear girl, most men of his generation do that——"

"I know, I know," she said impatiently. "I'm not arguing that he is crazy in any way, I'm only showing you how easy it would be for Ipps and the prosecution to prove it to the satisfaction of an average jury. They've only to build their case, and they can arrest him for murder on the almost certain hope of convicting him as some kind of homicidal maniac——"

"I don't believe it," I interrupted her.

"Don't believe what—that he did these murders ?"

"I don't believe that ; but what I meant was that I don't believe that Ipps could make a case against him."

"I'm not so sure."

"You haven't answered me about the means. The two victims weren't simply strangled. They were garrotted by something with metal points to it."

"I wondered this morning if Ipps came here to search for such an instrument."

"If he'd done that he wouldn't have been so casual about it. He'd have taken care to have everyone out of the place, so that he could search thoroughly and at leisure."

"Perhaps he would. But I'm not happy about it all, Mr. Armistead."

"How could you be—after what you saw on Friday and after what has happened since?" A sudden thought occurred to me, which must have lighted up my face, for her own assumed a sudden look of interest before I spoke. "Look here, Amy, if Mr. McTavish was implicated in the murder on Friday, why did those people follow us?"

Her face fell again.

"How do we know they weren't Ipps's men?" she asked.

At her reply I recalled how much care McTavish had that morning taken to throw Ipps and his men from the scent of our very innocent journey to interview Lady Duffield.

"And if they weren't Ipps's men," continued Amy, "how do we know they weren't the friends of the dead man, already on the track of the man who killed him?"

"But they didn't only follow McTavish: they followed you, too."

"I know. But, you see, they would be in the position of Ipps. They'd never believe that my encounter with Mr. McTavish after the murder on

Friday was purely accidental, particularly as we took immediate steps to act in concert. No. If they think at all, they must think that you and I are accomplices in some project of which Mr. McTavish is the ring-leader."

"But how absurd!"

"I'm not so sure that it is so absurd to an outside mind. You see, we know and understand Mr. McTavish—as far as anyone understands him—but they don't. There's another thing that has filled my mind this morning. Suppose that somebody wanted to involve him."

"Somebody wanted to involve McTavish? Well, suppose it. What follows? You can't possibly suppose that someone did a complicated murder in a busy spot just on the off-chance that McTavish would be walking past from the station and would have his attention attracted to it."

"No. I suppose not." She was silent for a moment or two. "I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't gone into that wretched courtyard to mend my suspender?"

"Why, the man would have lain in that room until morning, when the caretaker or somebody would have discovered him, and you and I and McTavish would never have known one another."

"You don't think that after dark the murderers would have come for the body?"

"After dark? Oh, you mean after real dark, after the city was absolutely deserted. . . . I don't know. They might have done. Why do you ask?"

"Because if that was the intention, there would be some kind of patrol arranged. That patrol might have been Mr. McTavish, or . . ."

She left the sentence unfinished.

"Or what ?" I asked.

"Or me," she said, almost in a whisper.

I saw immediately all that was in her mind. I rose from my chair and crossed to where she sat.

"Don't be foolish," I said brusquely, and shook her by the shoulder. "I won't believe that either you or McTavish had any hand in the horrible thing."

She clutched my hand.

"I know you won't, but that isn't the point. The point is, will other people believe it ? Will Ipps believe it ?"

As she spoke there came a sharp, official-sounding knock at the front door.

So taut were our nerves that for a moment we looked at each other, so that had there been a spectator to watch us he would have had little doubt of our guilty consciences.

The knock was sharply repeated.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"I'LL answer it," I said, and moved into and across the little hall.

I flung open the door, and found there a uniformed constable.

"Mr. Armistead ?" he asked.

"I am Mr. Armistead."

"I have a note here for you from Mr. McTavish."

"Thank you. Oh—er—officer, will you have a bottle of beer ?"

His face wreathed itself in smiles.

"Well, I don't mind if I do, sir. I'm just off duty."

"Come in."

He came in, and Amy helped him to one of the large bottles of table ale.

"Are you on the murder case with Inspector Ipps ?"

"I am, sir. And some case it is."

"Do you think you'll arrest anybody, or will it be one of these undiscovered mysteries ?"

The constable wiped his moustache appreciatively before replying.

"It isn't often that we have one of those 'undiscovered mysteries' with Innocent Ipps on the job, sir. I fancy he knows something already."

"Do you ? Why ?"

"Well, it's a strange thing, but we've all noticed

it—all of us that has come into contact with him, that is—that as soon as the Innocent gets on to the trail his American accent grows thicker and thicker. He spent a lot of time on the other side, did Ipps, when he was younger. He says he hasn't an American accent, but that he once had an English accent. He's a funny 'un to work with, is Innocent Ipps, I give you *my* word."

"And his accent is stronger now than it was yesterday, eh ?"

"Yesterday ! Bless your heart, sir, it's stronger now than it was first thing this morning. He is calm enough outside, as you might say, but he's all hot-up inside, and that's what makes his accent come back. And yet, I dunno as I can see any clue that can have excited him. But, of course, I'm only a supernumerary on this parade. I'm relief on the door. Well, much obliged for the drink, m'am. Much obliged to you, sir."

"Don't mention it, officer. Good morning."

" 'Morning, sir."

I saw him out, and returned, opening the note from McTavish.

"I told you, I told you," was Amy's greeting, as I re-entered the dining-room.

"You told me what ?"

"That Ipps thinks it's Mr. McTavish. He's all hot-up as that man said, because of Mr. McTavish."

"Don't be silly. It's probably because of some quite different reason. Let me read McTavish's note. Ah, he says we're not to wait for luncheon for him, as he's going out with the Innocent, but we're to stay in either until he returns or until he gets a message through to us. He says it is imperative that we should

not move out of the house until one of those two things releases us." I gave a sigh of unfeigned relief. "There you are, you see. You don't suppose that if Ipps suspected McTavish and had anything of a case against him they'd go off together like that. What's happened is that Ipps is on some quite different trail and has taken McTavish with him. Well, we have our orders. You don't mind being immured in this place with me for a whole afternoon, do you ?"

She seemed to shake off her gloomy mood, and to recover again the lighter spirits which I had earlier noted in her deportment.

"I think I can risk it," she said. "After all, you're not likely to try any of your Chinese tortures on me, are you ? Draw up your chair and carve the chicken. Do you know, Mr. Armistead, if you weren't such a sedate sort of person, this meal would be quite romantic, wouldn't it ? Like a honeymoon meal."

"I'm not really as sedate as all that," I said, matching her change of mood.

"No ?"

"No."

"Then perhaps I'd better not obey Mr. McTavish. I might be safer out of the way."

"Oh, you're safe enough," I assured her. "Innocent Ipps might suspect something more if he came in unexpectedly and found you mending another suspender."

"Mr. Armistead !" she cried, and blushed. The next moment she laughed. "What a relief. I didn't think you had it in you, old sober-sides."

"There's more in me than meets the eye," I gravely assured her, busy with the carving-knife, my eyes on my work.

"Yes. I'm quite sure of that," she answered in a voice so charged with meaning that I looked up and across the table to her. She was surveying me with a keen, alert gaze, from which all banter had passed, but as our eyes met her own twinkled again.

"Get on with your carving, Mr. Armistead," she commanded.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

It was ten o'clock that night before any word came from McTavish. Amy towards evening grew more and more restless. She tried to account for her growing impatience by saying that she ought either to have let her landlady know that she would be late or to have disobeyed Mr. McTavish and gone home.

The message which came was delivered by a husky-voiced street lounger and was in the shape of a hurried note scrawled on cheap notepaper, as if the writer had darted into some small shop, bought a twopenny packet of paper and envelopes and stood at the counter to write his letter in pencil. It bade me to take Amy Renton home to her lodging in Chelsea and then to come with all speed to an address in the East End.

It was about a quarter to eleven when I dismissed the taxi-cab at the corner of the small street which had been named and made my way to the appointed number. This proved to be one of those tall, five-storied houses built in the mid-years of Victoria's inglorious architectural reign. The whole neighbourhood in the eighteen-seventies had been, one imagined, a fairly select middle-class neighbourhood. It was now given over to cheap lodging-house keepers.

I wondered what had brought McTavish to this place, but after the long day's inaction—even spent in the pleasant company of Amy Renton—my chief

emotion was one of satisfaction that things were moving towards something more definite than mere speculation.

In answer to my ring the door was opened by a tall, harassed-looking woman, so little typical of her kind that her dress was not only not slatternly but was distinguished by a meticulous neatness.

"Is Mr. McTavish here?" I asked.

"Are you Mr. Armistead?"

"Yes."

"Come in, please."

I followed her into the dim hall. She threw open a door and motioned me into a room.

"Hillo, boy. 'Have you had quiet watch?' "

" 'Not a mouse stirring,' " I replied, capping his quotation automatically before I even had a glimpse of him.

McTavish was lounging in a dingy armchair before a sullen and smoky coal fire, as if he had occupied these quarters not for an hour or two, but for weeks past. On the table were the remains of a cold meal. At the side of the table away from the fire sat Inspector Ipps busily writing.

"Don't disturb him," said my friend, nodding his large head towards the intent figure. "He's writing an ode to me.

"O, Swete McTavish, can it be that you
Have found for us the much-desired clue?
And can it be that Scotland Yard must sue
Your bounty for instructions what to do?
Though we proclaim an imminent arrest
'Tis on your evidence that we must rest
Our case. So with that evidence be lavish,
O, sweet McTavish!

That's his first verse. He seems to be having a little difficulty with the second."

Inspector Ipps looked up with a slow smile wreathing his baby-like face.

"Vury volatile to-night, isn't he?" he said, and I, too, noticed what the constable had remarked upon, the quickening of the American intonation in his voice.

"What's happened?" I asked.

"Nothing very much. The Inspector and I have had a fairly strenuous afternoon and evening."

"Doing what?" I said, with some impatience.

"Chasing a woman."

"Chasing a woman?"

"Yes. Don't get excited. She wasn't a very pretty woman. She was the lady who has just admitted you."

"Who is she?"

"Mrs. Vibart, widow of the late Philip Kemble Vibart, that sound Shakespearean actor."

"I've never heard of him."

"Nor had I until to-night."

"What has he to do with these murders?"

"Nothing at all. But his wife was once maid to Lady Wayling."

"Oh, I see. Has she been able to tell you anything of importance? Was she with them at the seaside?"

"She was certainly with them at the seaside. That was why we were eager to find her. Whether she has told us anything of importance remains to be seen. We only arrived here about an hour ago, and we haven't yet had time to check her information. She wasn't easy to find. Like many another of her social stratum, she has had a nomadic career since she left service. She was 'on the road' with her husband for a year, until he caught pneumonia and died. Then she moved to a little theatre in the Midlands. That

closed down and she opened a lodging-house at Camberwell, her native suburb. From Camberwell she went to Leytonstone with her cousin, where they had a little shop. The little shop was sold, and she came here."

"How did you find her ?"

"We were put on to her identity by Tollinson, who didn't know what had happened to her except that she had married an actor called Vibart. I traced a number of Vibarts down the files of the *Era* until I found Philip Kemble, who had been playing in 'East Lynne' and other stock plays at Sandmouth about the time we estimate Lady Wayling was looking after the little boy. He seemed likely, so I steadily pursued him."

"Pursued him ?"

"Yes—down the files. You know the kind of thing—'Philip Kemble Vibart. With the McLintock tour. This week T.R., Huddersfield. Next, O.H., Scarborough.' Eventually I found his pathetic little obituary. That looked like check, but I persevered. A couple of weeks after the obituary notice I found a letter from Mrs. Vibart thanking his professional friends for their tribute to his memory, which seemed to have taken the form of a whip-round for the widow. That was dated from the theatre in the Midlands. A telephone talk to the postmaster there gave us the re-direction address she had left for letters. Camberwell was a bit hazy as to where she had gone to, not knowing whether the address was in Leyton or Leytonstone. We tried both, and the wrong one first. Once we found the little shop the rest was easy. We came on here."

"Well ?"

"Mrs. Vibart recalls quite vividly that holiday by

the sea. She doesn't profess to have enjoyed Lady Wayling's confidence, although she says Lady Wayling spoke freely enough to her about the family affairs. It seems that Lola Wayling didn't wish the boy to go back to South America because 'they' might corrupt him. We don't know who 'they' may have been, and we can only guess at what she meant by 'corrupting' him—probably nothing worse than gambling and racing. That might easily mean corruption to a woman's mind. Mrs. Vibart has an idea that at first the boy's mother brought him to England to be out of the father's way, and that she returned to South America, was reconciled to the father, and wanted the boy back. In the interval Lady Wayling had grown fond of the child, and, of course, did not share her sister's change of view about the father. When the mother pressed for the boy to be sent home, Lady Wayling tried to keep him."

"There doesn't seem much help in that story. We might have surmised all this."

"True. But there's better to follow. Mrs. Vibart remembers Lady Wayling being visited by a foreigner."

"What—a man ?"

"Yes. Presumably he was a friend of the father."

"What makes you think that ?"

"Because there was a row, eventually, and Lady Wayling forbade him the house. He didn't come again, in the sense of calling upon her, but Mrs. Vibart remembers his hanging about the town."

"The boy was sent home eventually. What made Lady Wayling weaken in her resolution ?"

"She didn't. That's part of Mrs. Vibart's story. What eventually happened was that the sister came over and took the boy, almost by force. She had almost

literally to kidnap her own son from his aunt. Hence the serious breach between the two sisters."

"Does this carry us any farther towards discovering who killed Lady Wayling three or four years after all this?"

"Four and a half years after. It doesn't help us much at the moment, but it may."

"How may it?"

"Mrs. Vibart says she has frequently seen the foreign visitor since."

"What!"

"Yes. Has frequently seen him. Unfortunately she knows little or nothing about him. He apparently rejoiced in the commonplace and transpontine name of Pedro. Half the faithful muleteers in popular melodrama are called Pedro. 'Wanted—missing witness—last seen in Shaftesbury Avenue on the night of January 5th—dark complexion—fiery temper—brown eyes—answers to the name of Pedro—finder rewarded—no questions asked.'"

Inspector Ipps finished his writing, pocketed his fountain-pen and looked up.

"Say, Mr. McTavish, you ought to have been a dutch-auction merchant or a camp meeting pea-nut seller. As a tracer of lost persons your verbal flow is wasted."

McTavish smiled sweetly.

"Never mind, Inspector. Armistead likes to hear me talk. Have you finished that statement?"

"Yep." He folded the papers before him and placed them carefully in his breast-pocket.

"But surely," I said, "you haven't brought me out from Mayfair in a taxi just to hear about Mrs. Vibart."

Inspector Ipps came round the table and warmed his portly frame for a moment before the fire, straddling

the hearth-rug between the two chairs which were occupied by McTavish and me.

"No," said McTavish. "I can't deceive you, Armistead. Your honest eyes compel me, for once in a way, to speak the truth. It wasn't for that that we brought you. Inspector Ipps wanted to ask you if you'd seen a packet of cigarette-papers lying about. He thinks he left some behind him this morning."

Ipps chuckled.

"Go easy, Mr. McTavish, go easy. You've twisted my tail quite enough about those cigarette-papers. Hadn't you better spill a few more beans for your friend, Mr. Armistead?"

"Perhaps I had. Listen, Armistead. Do you remember what we talked about over dinner the night we found the murdered man in Bishopsgate?"

"Well, we talked of a good many things."

"Yes. But when I suggested that I was keen upon finding the murderer of that poor fellow you said that amateur detecting wouldn't work outside the pages of a seven-and-sixpenny thriller, because life is too sane and humdrum. . . ."

"Yes, I do remember saying something like that."

"And I replied that it is the novelists' fictional world which is sane and humdrum, because no novelist dares to suggest one tithe of the oddities of life or to use one tithe of its queer coincidences. Well, here's a first-rate coincidence for you. The place where Lady Wayling took her small nephew was Barfield."

"Barfield? That's somewhere on the north-east coast, isn't it?"

"Yes. It is in Yorkshire. Does the name convey nothing to you?"

"It seems vaguely familiar."

"Vaguely familiar! Mrs. Vibart happens to have a snapshot of herself and her husband—her wooer only in those days—taken by some fellow-busker in his stock company."

Ipps had taken out his notebook and extracted from it a small photograph, which he handed to me. It displayed two figures standing together arm-in-arm in the fashions of four years before. Like most amateur photographs, the operator of the camera, using, no doubt, a box viewfinder, had failed to focus his "sitters" accurately, with the result that they were but small objects in the middle of the print. Behind them was a gateway, leading apparently to some kind of gardens. Across the gateway was spread an arch of wood which bore some kind of name.

"Can you read the name over that gateway?" asked McTavish.

I peered at it.

"No, I'm afraid not."

Ipps passed me his pocket lens. Under the glass the name sprang up.

" 'William Watson Hogarth—Landscape Gardener'," I read aloud.

"Now, what about coincidences?"

I was still very stupid.

"I'm afraid I don't——"

Ipps at my side chuckled. He turned the leaves of his notebook backwards, found a particular entry and read it to me.

" 'Amy Renton, daughter of John Philip Renton, bank cashier in the Barfield Branch of Curtin's Bank, Barfield, Yorkshire, and of Amy Renton, née Hogarth, daughter of William Watson Hogarth, landscape gardener, also of Barfield,' "

I sprang from my chair.

"But, good heavens, *is* it coincidence?" I cried.

"Why shouldn't it be?" asked McTavish, with something in his tone that seemed to me to dictate the answer to his own question.

"There's no reason why it shouldn't be," I said, "but if these two murders have an origin connecting them with a visit to Barfield four and a half years ago, and the first victim is actually discovered in London by a girl from Barfield, it is rather—odd."

"So odd," said Inspector Ipps, "that we want someone to go up to the place and make a few inquiries. That someone had better not be an official policeman. Mr. McTavish suggested you."

"Do you propose telling Miss Renton?" I asked.

Both Inspector Ipps and McTavish pursed up their lips.

"Well," said the Inspector, "it's a little difficult. If there is more than coincidence in her being the person who found the body, the worst thing we could do would be to put her wise to our suspecting it."

"Do you actually suspect her of having some direct hand in these murders?"

"She'd be about eighteen when Lady Wayling was down at Barfield. Quite old enough to be mixed up in some intrigue."

"But, dammit, she'd be out of Barfield. She'd be either at school or college."

"There are such things as summer vacations, Mr. Armistead."

"What sort of inquiries do you want making?"

"Oh, just general inquiries. We'd like to know about this dark fellow who visited the Waylings, where he stayed, who he was, what he did with his leisure,

Nothing very technical or difficult. The local innkeepers should know all about him. They've long memories for foreigners."

"I don't like it," I said, hating in some way the idea of spying on Amy Renton's past, however innocent it might prove to be.

"I don't like it, either, but these things, you know, must be before a famous victorie," said McTavish.

"When shall I go ?"

"It is now about eleven-thirty. There's a good night mail from King's Cross about two."

"But I've nothing packed or ready !"

"That's all right. Buy as you go."

"What's the chronic hurry ?"

"If you go straight away, you arrive there in time for breakfast. You may have learnt all we wish to know before the day is out and be back here to-morrow night. To-morrow is the inquest on Lady Wayling."

"Be a good fellow, Armistead, and go," said McTavish.

"Of course I'll go, if you say so. I've put myself under you for rations and discipline, so to speak. What are *you* doing ?"

"We're staying here for the night. Mrs. Vibart is putting us up."

"Staying here ? . . ."

"Yes. The lady is very kindly ferretting out the letters she wrote to her late husband. They probably contain a good running story of what was happening during that seaside visit."

"I see. Well, if that's all, I'll hop away and spend an hour or so in the Turkish bath in Southampton Row. It'll be some compensation for the loss of a night's sleep in that damned night mail."

"Good. Don't be too eager in making your inquiries. Let 'em think you were up there four years ago and are just asking about old acquaintances. If you strike anything that seems to you sensational and immediate, wire me at the mews."

We exchanged a few more words, and I went out to find the nearest Underground station. As I walked through the night air I found myself wondering if the main object of my inquiries at Barfield might not be to get me out of the way for nine or ten hours, although why my quiet presence should be an embarrassment to either McTavish or Ipps I could not surmise. Had the possibility been great of Barfield revealing any first-rate clue to the reasons for the killing of Lady Wayling, it would have been Ipps himself, I thought, who would have been travelling north. But Ipps, it was obvious, was not prepared to tear himself away from the side of McTavish.

Only one other passenger entered the Underground train with me, and I paid little attention to him during the journey to Euston Square. That little attention quickened to acute interest when I found him sharing with me the hot room of the Turkish bath. His presence there, I thought, might be another of those coincidences of which McTavish talked, but it seemed to me that the watch which had been set upon our movements after the discovery of the Cuban was not relaxed. Someone, whether criminal or police, was determined that we should not take any action without its being known.

It occurred to me that perhaps one of the reasons why I had been called out to the house of Mrs. Vibart to start the northern journey was that I might draw off from McTavish and Ipps one of the watchers. If

that surmise was sound, it could not be the police who were shadowing us.

The Turkish bath had, I remembered, two exits, which was no doubt why the man had actually followed me in, and had not contented himself with waiting until I emerged again into the street. Once in he had placed himself at a disadvantage, for the odds against his being able to gauge my moment of leaving and following me were heavy. He would no doubt get into conversation with me, and so serve part of his purpose.

I moved over from one of the deckchairs where I had placed myself and stretched my length along a side couch. The attendant came paddling in with his metal flagons of drinking water. I took one, but the other man refused.

"I don't think it's altogether good to sip water in the hot rooms," he said to me earnestly. "There is always a danger of sudden cramp in the stomach."

His tone was so essentially that of the fussy valetudinarian that I was tempted to dismiss my suspicion that he was on my trail, and to consider him, again, as one of McTavish's coincidences.

For a few moments we exchanged words about the best way to enjoy the bath and the best baths to enjoy, as men will, met by chance in such a way.

"Are you spending the night here ?" he asked.

"I really don't know," I lied. "I may do. It all depends how I feel when I reach the cooling-room."

He had brought an evening paper down with him and now opened its crackling pages.

"A terrible thing, this Hardy Street murder," he remarked.

"A murder ?" I said.

"Yes. Lady Wayling strangled in her bed—this morning—inquest to-morrow."

"Who did it ?"

"Well they haven't arrested anybody yet, but I should say the husband did it."

What an actor the man was, if he were, indeed, an agent engaged upon the task of keeping all interested parties to that murder under observation. His voice was exactly right, that of the disinterested man-in-the-street discussing the case with a casually met acquaintance.

The attendant came back, gathering my empty flagon and proffering me a full one. I propped myself on one elbow to sip the water and saw the man disappear through the two rooms that lay between us and the massage chamber, which was screened off by a curtain.

"Not many people use the bath at this time of night. The attendant only comes in once every ten minutes or so. What a lonely place the inner hot-room is. How easily a man could be murdered here," said my fellow occupant, still in a tone of idle speculation. He had turned the deckchair a little towards where I lay.

"I don't know," I said. "The discovery of the murder and the murderer would be inevitable and quick."

"I'm not so sure. Properly done, the death would be attributed to heart-failure from the heat. What a way to stop anybody from making an awkward journey —to get them here on the way to the train and put an end to them."

His newspaper fluttered to the ground, and he stood up. He walked down the length of the three rooms, looked through the curtains into the massage chamber, and came slowly back, a powerfully built fellow, looking

like some gladiator as he stepped slowly over the hot mattings with a towel about his loins and another thrown lightly over the broad shoulders.

If he were what I suspected him to be, and if he were about to put his theory into practice, it behoved me to be upright. I slid off the couch and stood to my feet.

"There isn't an attendant in the place," he said.

"He's probably gone upstairs to bring another bather down." I made a show of casually picking up the deckchair as if to move it a few feet. Whoever held the chair was armed.

We both seemed to listen for an intent moment for the sound of the attendant's return. There was a murmur of voices at the other side of the curtain, and down the vista of the other two rooms we saw the man enter accompanied by another user of the bath. My interlocutor flung himself down on the couch I had just vacated and I reopened the folding-chair.

"I suppose," said my talkative acquaintance, "that the reason men aren't murdered in Turkish baths is because of the interruptions."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I WAS the first to be massaged, and after nearly an hour in the cooling-room I drank two cups of black coffee, dressed and slipped out to catch my train to the north. There were no sleepers, but I managed to get a first-class carriage to myself. Until we moved out of the station I watched cautiously from the window, but saw no signs either of my acquaintance of the bath or any other follower.

The bath had done me good, and I stretched my length along the carriage cushions and slept like a babe, wakening only at the two stops before the great industrial city where I had to change for the coast-line. There I had half an hour to wait. It was a bleak morning, and at half past five the refreshment-room was closed. There was, however, a perambulating coffee-and-sandwich wagon under the lee of a set of arches, at which I refreshed myself. No other, apparently, had left the London train to change into the coast train. The few passengers who were disgorged left the platforms for the town. My only company at the wagon consisted of two young men and a carriage cleaner, talking of a football team.

It was seven when I reached Barfield. The early tramcars had not begun to run and the little seaside town was almost dead. I asked the sleepy ticket-collector which was the best hotel for breakfast, and

he mentioned three, all within a few minutes' walk from the station. Of these, two, when I came to them, proved to be great fashionable places, which would be at their worst at that time of the year. The third rejoiced in the unoriginal name of the "County and Commercial", from which I guessed it to be a house for the more prosperous type of commercial traveller. This meant that its service would be excellent all the year round, and that the kitchen staff would be early astir.

I rang a bell and a "boots" opened the door to me. In the hall a couple of girls were washing the floor and generally preparing the place for its day's activities. The "boots" was a little doubtful whether I could have any breakfast for another hour, but a commercial-room waitress crossing the hall at that moment reminded him that Number Nineteen was down for an early call and breakfast. I asked her to repeat his order on my behalf and went to warm myself at the commercial-room fire, acutely conscious that my chin was scrubby and my collar wilted and dirty. In a few minutes the early rising traveller came bustling in, a picture of good grooming. His eyebrows went up at the sight of me.

"Hello, good morning, good morning. Just come in ?"

"Good morning. Yes."

"Ah, I thought you weren't one of us last night. Just as well for you. 'Pon my word, I don't know why I sit up when I'm down for an early start. We had Phil Groggan with us—you know old Phil, of Gamble and Gamble, the toy people ?—and he kept us going at a great pace. The damn' fool had us community singing until two o'clock. Community singing ! Good Lord ! Little Jonesy from the bar was

in great form. Good voice, that girl. Wasted behind a bar. Things very flat here. Trade dead. Absolutely dead. What's your line ?"

My line at that moment was lying.

"Bulbs," I said.

"What—those things ?" He jerked a thumb at the electric-light.

"No. The other kind."

"Oh. Not many calls here, I suppose. There's only Hogarth's and Wimple's." He yawned. "This place is growing, you know. I've worked this journey for forty years, and when I first went out on the road this place was a mere village. It's a sizable place now. I remember this house before they rebuilt it. I used to run over for an hour from Scarlington. I stay a couple of nights each journey nowadays. Hello, Mattie, good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Lamington," said the waitress, who had entered with a tray of hot covers. "Your porridge is here and the eggs won't be a moment."

She set two places at the big dining-table in the middle of the room. We drew up our chairs. Mattie next placed a collecting-box between us. For a moment I was in danger of giving myself away as no genuine bagman, but seeing Mr. Lamington deposit a penny in the slot I did the same, casting a furtive eye at the label on the box, and discovering it as the support of the Commercial Travellers' schools.

"I'm in office fittings," said my new elderly friend, speaking through his porridge as a fairy queen in a pantomime speaks through the slow music of the orchestra. I grew professionally sage.

"No wonder you find trade flat. Not much money being spent in your line just at present."

"No, my boy. And what makes it worse is that my returns were so inflated when the excess profits duty was on, and everybody avoided it by spending their damned profits on refitting. Makes me shiver to look at my figures nowadays."

"Do you do any trade with Hogarth's or Wimple's ?" I asked casually.

"I've done a bit with Hogarth's. They run our files and binders. Wimple's are no good to me. They buy from London. Do you book orders here ? I suppose you will, and invoice 'em to Town. That's all right if Town's part of your ground. It isn't with me, and the Town fellow gets Wimple's commission. Good fellow, old Hogarth was. Do you remember him ?"

"No. I'm new on this ground. Did you know the daughter, who married Renton of Curtin's bank ?"

"I should think I did. She's living out at Ribbleton with her sister. Renton was a milksop kind of fella. Nice kid they had, old William's granddaughter. Took to schoolmistressing. I fancy she's living in London."

Mattie came with our eggs and bacon. Mr. Lamington glanced at his watch and fell on the new dish with speed.

"You remember little Amy Renton, don't you, Mattie, old Hogarth's granddaughter ? Has Jim taken my bags over ?"

"They're just going, Mr. Lamington. Yes, I remember Amy Renton. She's living in London. Her mother's out at Ribbleton now."

Lamington had no time for further gossip. He bolted his eggs, made a flying attack on the marmalade, dabbed his white moustache with his table napkin, cried aloud for his bill, which he pursued into the hall after

wishing me a hearty good morning. I heard him chaffing Mattie and the girl in the hotel office, and saw him a moment afterwards go striding past the window with the energy of a boy, for all his sixty odd years.

Mattie came back into the room to clear his dirtied plates and cup.

"A pleasant gentleman, Mr. Lamington," she remarked.

"Very. He's been coming here for a long time, he tells me. He knew old Mr. Hogarth well."

I was feeling my way cautiously.

"Oh, yes. We all knew Mr. Hogarth. And Mr. Renton."

"What was he like ?"

"Oh, a very nice, quiet gentleman. He was in the bank. He and Mr. Hogarth used to come in quite a lot at first, and then Mr. Renton stopped coming. When he first came the bank was only a little wooden place. Then it grew and they built the new brick bank. After that, I suppose, it didn't do for one of the bank gentlemen to come to a place like this. Mr. Hogarth came to the day of his death."

"What was the little girl like ?"

"Oh, she was a nice little thing. Very clever, she was, they tell me, as she grew up. Bit of a tartar in some ways, though."

"Bit of a tartar ?"

"Well, you know. Nothing wrong, but flighty, like a lot of those High School girls. She came back as a teacher, but she didn't stick it long. Too high-spirited, I suppose."

"I suppose they taught high spirits at the High School," I fatuously said, making what I thought was

a joke in character. Mattie evidently so regarded it, for she gave an obliging chuckle.

"Never thought of that," she said. "It was said that little Redhead went a bit too far with a Spanish gentleman one summer . . ." she resumed in a reminiscent vein.

"Little Redhead ?" I innocently asked.

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't know Amy Renton. Well, she's regular carrots—ginger for pluck, you know—little Redhead was her gran'pa's name for her. Pretty girl, though, when she began to grow up."

"Who was the Spanish gentleman ?" I asked, buttering a piece of toast and trying to keep my voice as casual as before.

"Oh, I dunno. Some visitor. But she seemed to go about with him a good deal. Perhaps he wasn't Spanish. But he was very dark, brown-skinned and all that."

"Did he stay here ?"

"Lor' bless you, not he. He was a cut above us. He stayed at the Imperial or the Cautley Arms, I dunno which."

"Funny place for a foreigner to come to for his summer holiday, a quiet place like this."

"Oh, I dunno. We get a good many well-to-do people here, you know. It's not as lively as Scarlington, and some of them like the quiet."

"Had he any friends here ? Did he know the Rentons ?"

"He had some friends, I think. They said he went a good deal to see some people that had a furnished house out beyond the parade. I fancy he picked little Redhead up through meeting her father at the bank."

There was the sound of another cheery voice in the hall.

"Good gracious—Mr. Evans! He's catching the eight-fifty."

She picked up her tray and went. I followed her out, not feeling disposed to face the rest of the customers until I had been barbered. The owner of the cheery voice, a rubicund fellow in the late thirties, was passing the time of day with Jim, the "boots", and the girl in the office. We gave each other "good morning" as I asked for my bill.

"Will you be back for lunch? It's County Pie day," asked Mattie.

What County Pie day might be I did not know, but I told her to keep a place for me. Half an hour afterwards, shaved, and with a new collar, I strolled down the parade—which was the main sea-front of the little town—savouring the fresh breeze and the sight of the waves, and wondering where next I could turn my attention for more information about little Redhead and her Spanish gentleman.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

It was impossible now to credit the fact that Amy Renton's presence in Bishopsgate that night within a few feet of the dead man was the accident it had seemed to be. The links in the chain leading from him to her were too many. First a Cuban was found garrotted. Next a Cuban lady married to a wealthy Englishman was found garrotted. The two deaths were obviously wrought in the same manner. In the one case Amy Renton found the body. In the other she was now known by me to have had some kind of contact in the past either with the victim or with someone in close association with the victim. But she had not disclosed any previous knowledge of, or touch with, Lady Wayling, and this silence now became exceedingly significant. Certain remarks made by Inspector Ipps and his keen interest in the house to which Amy now had free access, and from whose windows one saw the back of the Wayling house, came back to my memory. His intense interest in McTavish, it now seemed, was really an intense interest in McTavish's secretary. My next inevitable thought was that the offer made by McTavish to find work for Amy was perhaps not the simple offer that it had seemed.

I remembered next the manner of the meeting between McTavish and Amy Renton, her turning into

the courtyard and his halting to watch her. It might easily be, I told myself, that I had been too simple in my reception of that incident. Perhaps my cannoning into McTavish's shoulder had upset a prearranged contact. But if that were so, why had McTavish been anxious not to allow me to go my way after the police had taken our names and our stories? Was it that I would give an air of unpremeditation and innocence to his association with Amy Renton? Granted for one startling moment the theory that he and the girl were in some kind of concert, and that I was being used as a kind of camouflage for their machinations after the first murder, to which they had both been privy, if not active in its execution, many things fitted into place.

But why should McTavish send me to the very township where I might blunder into something more definite about the girl's association with Lady Wayling? And why had he been at pains to lead Ipps to the house of Mrs. Vibart? Or had he? Might it not have been Ipps who had led McTavish there?

It seemed to me as I walked that if I once let my mind speculate with theories as to the honesty of McTavish and Amy Renton I should complicate my immediate task, and lead myself into the error of over-estimating whatever casual information I managed to gather. An early newsboy passed with an armful of papers. I stopped him, but he refused to sell one to me on the plea that he was delivering the morning's orders. He directed me to a small shop in a street running parallel to the parade, and there I went, buying a couple of popular and sensational dailies. They would make the most, I knew, of anything which had happened in the Wayling murder.

Either it had not occurred to the Press to connect the Bishopsgate murder with the tragedy in Hardy Street, or Inspector Ipps had managed to secure a silence on that connection. Neither paper had much to say that was new. The chief item of intelligence was the fact that Sir Herman Wayling was seriously indisposed and might not be available at the inquest, which, in consequence, might prove purely formal with an adjournment to a later day. There was in one of the papers a special article on Lady Wayling and her earlier dancing career, and in the other a similar article on Herman Wayling and his family.

Having glanced over these I returned to the shop where I had bought them and bought some cigarettes as an excuse to talk. The tobacconist-newsagent was very voluble about the tragedy.

"She was a lovely woman," he remarked.

"So I should suppose from the photographs."

"Ah, they don't do her justice."

"You've seen her ?"

"Aye, she stayed here a few years ago, for a summer. I used to deliver the papers. Mr. Buckler, of the Barfield *Argus*, was in only yesterday talking about her. He's writing a fine story for the mid-week issue."

"Where's their office ?"

"About five minutes away. You take the first right and the next left, and that brings you to Marine Street. They have that red-brick building opposite the theatre."

I exchanged a few more words and made my way to the newspaper office. There I asked boldly for Mr. Buckler, as if I were his oldest friend or his long-lost brother. The clerk in the front office, who seemed still hardly awake, directed me to the editorial department, which was completely tenantless. I kicked my

heels in a corridor for perhaps ten minutes until a youth came hurrying in. I inquired from him of Mr. Buckler's movements. He opened the editorial door and we entered together. A scrutiny of the big diary revealed that Mr. Buckler was marked for the police-court that morning.

"They don't sit until half past ten. He may look in for a couple of minutes before he goes over."

"I'll wait, if I may. It's nearly ten now."

The youth had no objection to my waiting. It seemed that he and Buckler were the total staff of the little newspaper, apart from one or two district men who were stationed at various parts of the coast and the farming area behind it.

"I suppose you're a native of Barfield ?" I said.

He nodded.

"I wonder if you knew my old friend Renton, of Curtin's bank ?"

"My father knew him. I knew Amy Renton. She's gone to London."

"So I believe. Somebody told me that she was engaged to a foreigner. I suppose that was broken off."

"It was never on." He flung away his cigarette. "After old Renton died they had to take a lodger or two. Old man Hogarth, Amy's grandfather, hadn't anything, you know. The business was all right, but it didn't pay too well, and he spent what it made. The foreigner you speak of was a man they took in for a week or two. I remember him very well. I was only a kid then, and he was rather an attractive fellow. I'm two years younger than Amy, but I used to see a good deal of her before she went to the University, and that's how I came to know the Spanish fellow. He

used to take us out to tea and that sort of thing. He was very fond of kids, I fancy. He was particularly attracted by a nipper who was staying here that summer, a little fellow called Oliver something."

"Another foreigner ?"

"Yes. Jolly kid. We used to see him on the sands with his aunt. Do you know who she was ?"

"Who was she ?"

"Lady Wayling !"

I was commendably surprised.

"Not the one who's been murdered ?"

"Yes. Old Buckler and I have been writing her up."

"Why—what about her ?"

"Oh, nothing really, you know. Just about the house she stayed in and all that."

"Where did she stay ?"

"She took the Lawsons' house furnished. It's that isolated place just off the end of the parade, where they are laying out the new municipal golf-course. I shall have to go now. I'm doing the Methodist Conference at Scarlington. I don't suppose Buckler will be long. If he doesn't come by ten-twenty-five you'd better try the police-court."

If there was nothing really new in their write-up of Lady Wayling's visit to Barfield I was not prepared to wait.

"I think I'll look in later on and see him," I said.

"Righto. I shall not be back until seven to-night or I'd give him a message for you. I suppose there's nothing I could do ?"

"No, thanks. It's purely a personal call."

He mounted a push-bike outside the office and rode off. I turned my steps towards the Lawsons' house.

The new golf-course was already laid out, in the sense that there were sticks and string and patches of upturned earth. In the middle of the staked area stood an old-fashioned farmhouse which had evidently been converted to a private residence when Barfield began to show signs of becoming a resort. There were one or two workmen pottering about, but they paid no attention to me as I crossed their terrain towards the building.

The house was empty and in its garden stood a notice that it was to be the new Municipal Golfers' Club House. I tried the door and found it locked, but the door at the back was open.

What I expected to derive from wasting a quarter of an hour in this place I did not know, but it seemed an obvious covert to draw. I had vague memories that the detectives of fiction searching in such a place always found a loose floorboard with incriminating documents buried beneath it, or, at the very least, a clue of some kind. For my part, that morning, I trapsed all over the great house and found nothing of any importance, although I religiously turned over every loose board which squeaked or moved beneath my tread.

My next move, I thought, was to have a look at the house where Mrs. Renton had had her Spanish paying guest those four and a half years ago. I found it without much difficulty, the address being in an old directory to the town which the girl at the free library obligingly turned up for me. It was a modest villa, for which, before the War, a rental of about thirty pounds a year would be paid. Its present occupant, a bride-like girl of about twenty-five, knew nothing of the Rentons, and thought that the house had been twice let or sold since the year I named. She and

her husband were new to Barfield and knew few people.

It was now about eleven o'clock. I found a motor-bus service running to Ribbleton and at noon was asking for Mrs. Renton at the house of her sister. The maid who answered my ring showed me into a parlour plentifully adorned with photographs, including two or three of "little Redhead" whose antecedents I was now bunglingly trying to explore. It was at one of these that I was looking when the door opened and a faded woman in the mid-forties came into the room.

"Mrs. Renton?" I said.

She bowed.

"I'm afraid I'm an unusual caller, but I met your daughter in London last week, and, happening to be in the neighbourhood, I thought I'd call to see you."

"I'm always glad to meet Amy's friends. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you. My name is Armistead. Miss Renton has taken a position with a friend of mine. She may have written to you."

"Oh, you are Mr. Armistead. Yes. She did write. I was very relieved. I was very much against Amy's going to London, but she would go. Her father's death left us a little—a little straitened for means."

"That so often happens, doesn't it? And then the women who are left have to show the courage that is in them." I sounded like a sentimental character in one of Jerome's plays.

"It isn't uncommon, I fear. Fortunately we had my husband's insurance money, and Amy had her scholarships."

I wondered if Amy had told this placid mother of hers of the actual incident which had brought her and McTavish and me together.

"Life is much more exciting for a young girl in London than in a little place like Barfield."

"I suppose it is. But Amy seemed to find Barfield exciting enough."

It was obvious that no word of the gruesome discovery had been communicated, nor had the girl's name caught the mother's eye in the reports of the inquest.

"Your daughter seems very well and happy," I said next.

"She writes quite happily. I feared she was a bit worried before she found this post. Is it a good post, Mr. Armistead ?"

"I think so."

"I'm so old-fashioned. I can't feel comfortable about a young girl alone in a great city."

"What first took her there, Mrs. Renton ?"

"She didn't like teaching in a school, for one thing, and she was a bit restless."

"Restless ?"

"Unsettled. I think she made a friend a few years ago who unsettled her."

"Really ?"

"Yes. He was a very nice, very pleasant, very wealthy gentleman who—who stayed with us one summer. A Spaniard. Amy was just at the romantic age. I think they had a tiff of some kind towards the end of his visit. But I didn't ask. She's very modern. She never confided much in me. She's been a good daughter, though, but never the kind of daughter I thought she'd be when she was a little thing." There was pathos here. "Her grandfather and father spoiled her, you know."

She talked on for a few minutes about her early

married life, and I listened politely, but with no genuine interest.

As I rose to leave, refusing an invitation, not too warmly pressed, to stay for luncheon, I ventured a leading question.

"You would know this unfortunate Lady Wayling quite well, I suppose, Mrs. Renton ?"

"Oh, isn't that a terrible thing ! What villains there are at large ! No, I didn't know her, although they tell me she had the Lawsons' house one year. I was never much of a one for getting about, you see."

"Miss Renton would hear more of the distinguished visitors to Barfield than you would, I suppose."

"Oh, yes. But she wouldn't take much interest in them, I don't suppose. We have too many titled gentry here nowadays for them to cause much interest. And, of course, Amy would only be about seventeen when they say Lady Wayling was here."

"You never hear from your Spanish friend ?"

"Oh, no. He wasn't exactly a friend, you see. He was only . . ." she blushed a little, the old habit of respectability still strong upon her—"a paying-guest. I think Amy mistook his attitude towards her. He was very civil and courteous, and she was just a school-girl to him."

"I see. Well, good morning, Mrs. Renton. I'll tell Miss Renton I've seen you."

She thanked me and we parted. As the bus jolted me the ten miles back to Barfield I did not feel that I had gained much by my visit to either place beyond establishing the fact that Amy Renton had in some way known the Spaniard—as they called him, Cuban as, no doubt, he really was—who had visited Lady Wayling during her holiday with her sister's son. It

was a fair presumption that it had been the same man. Two Spanish visitors might, of course, have visited the little seaside resort that summer, but had that been so the gossiping waitress or the junior reporter would have remembered.

The thought of the waitress recalled to me that it was County Pie day. The sea air had given a tang to my appetite. I turned in at the door of the County and Commercial Hotel ready to do ample justice to the *pièce de résistance* on Mattie's table. Something short with gin in it as an aperitif was obviously indicated before I ate, and to get that I looked into a small side bar-room, where Jonesy wasted her voice on unappreciative loungers. At the threshold of that room I paused, my appetite suddenly taken from me. Leaning against the bar, and evidently enjoying to the full the cocktail which he held, was my friend from the Turkish bath.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

My first instinct was to turn quickly and leave the place. I should have done so had it not been for the whimsical smile with which the cocktail-drinker was regarding me. I had not realized, either in the London tube train or in the hot-room, how pleasant a face the fellow had. He had one of those square-cut but rather crooked jowls, and a snub nose which gave to him a look of boyish impudence. He wore his hair cropped quite close to his bullet head.

As I sauntered up to the bar with every effort to look unperturbed he said, quite angrily :

" 'Ullo ! Have a cocktail ? They won't give you a sudden cramp in the stomach."

His effrontery was perfect. I met it in kind.

"Thanks. I'll have a dry Martini."

He ordered and paid for it, and I drank to him. He nodded over his own glass.

"I say," I said, "are you following me ?"

"I was just about to ask you the same question."

"But——"

"Well, dammit, you were in my train last night, you were in the Turkish bath, and now you come in here."

"But I was in the train and the bath first."

"Were you ? I'm not so sure. You were certainly

in the hot-room first, but then I'm a slow undresser, and you'd know that I would come down there." He sipped his drink. "You won't deny that I was here first."

"No. I won't deny that. Have another?"

"Thanks."

We received the two indifferent Martinis from Jonesy and again nodded to each other. I was tempted to ask him pointblank who and what he was, but I refrained.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me.

"I'm just about to sample some County Pie."

"What might that be, when it's at home?"

"I'll tell you when I've tried it."

"Where is it?"

"In the commercial-room."

"But they won't let you eat there. You'll have to eat in the coffee-room. I know these hotels."

"Of course they'll let me eat there. I'm a traveller in bulbs. Ask Mattie."

"Mattie?"

"The commercial-room waitress."

I had him guessing now.

"You seem to know this house well."

"I ought to. I've been using it for years. You ask Jonesy how long Lamington, Phil Groggan, Evans, and I have been coming here."

"Jonesy?"

I nodded towards the girl behind the bar. As luck would have it she caught my eye in a mirror and smiled back.

"Recovered from the community singing, Jonesy?" I asked her.

"What a night!" was her reply.

"Groggan, Lamington, and Evans—as usual," I blithely proceeded, banking on the girl's being unable to remember every casual traveller who had ever stayed in the hotel. She played beautifully into my hands.

"You know, you're all bad boys," she said, and passed down the bar again. I looked triumphantly at my interlocutor. He tried one question.

"Many customers in this town ?" he asked.

"Only Hogarth's and Wimple's. Well, so-long, I'm going to investigate that pie."

"I should think you're good at investigating things, aren't you ?"

"Not too bad," I assured him, and left the bar-room to take my place at the commercial table. When the meal was over he seemed to have gone, and I breathed more freely ; for all that I was still puzzled as to whom he might be. From his appearance and manner he might easily have been a police officer, and he was certainly not a Cuban.

McTavish had sent me north to discover where the dark man who visited Lady Wayling had stayed, what he had done with his leisure and his name. The first of these things I had easily discovered. His name did not much matter now, for Amy could tell us that. I had, in fact, discovered one fact of the very first importance, for which McTavish could not have hoped, and that was Amy's close knowledge of the fellow.

The "boots" on being asked told me of a good train to London at three o'clock, and at five minutes past that hour I was snugly placed in the corner of a first-class carriage reading the evening paper, from which I learnt that the inquest on Lady Wayling had been

adjourned after the formal police and medical evidence. It was about ten minutes to nine when I again climbed the staircase of the mews which for the time being I was calling home.

The place was in darkness, and I had no key. I gave a hopeful knock and waited. There was no answer. Again I knocked and this time I heard somebody moving inside. After a moment or two the door opened and I stepped in. It was, I thought, McTavish who had admitted me ; but why he had been sitting alone in the darkness I could not conjecture. I brushed past him and hung up my hat and coat.

"What luck your end ?" I asked. "I fancy I've found a thread."

"You don't say !" said the quiet tenor voice of Ipps. "Please don't speak so loudly and come into the sitting-room."

Into the sitting-room I went, he following me. On the table was a square pocket-torch propped against a couple of books, so that its light lay like a broad riband along the cloth. Ipps softly closed the door and took his seat at the table, motioning me to a chair opposite to him.

"Upon my word, you're very mysterious," I exclaimed.

"Well, I'm on the premises without permission. In fact, I 'effected an entrance' as they say in the police-courts."

"What's the matter ? Where's McTavish ? And Miss Renton ?"

"I don't know. But I expect Mr. McTavish back any minute. That's why I didn't switch on the light. When you knocked I wasn't sure whether it was you or the girl, and I didn't want either of you hanging

about on the doorstep when the master of the house returned."

The American intonation of his voice was more pronounced than I had known it.

"Have you discovered something useful ?" I asked.

"Useful ! Yep. I think you might call it useful. It didn't need much thinking to see where the lines crossed in this case, did it ?"

"Didn't it ?"

"No. First of all there was the happy accident that Mr. McTavish happened to be on the spot when the body of that Cuban was discovered. The Cuban had just taken a meal at the nearby railway station where he had fallen in to conversation with a big man whom the waiters thought might be a parson. Mr. McTavish is a big man who could easily be mistaken for a parson. He displayed a quite morbid interest in the murder."

"Oh, I don't think so. Anyone who was dragged into the beginnings of a mystery like that would display a keen interest in its solution. He'd feel a kind of proprietorial interest."

"Would he ?"

"Of course he would. I did myself."

He chuckled.

"I know that. And Mr. McTavish took care that your proprietorial interest didn't abate any. He went to some pains to attach to himself the other two casual strangers who had stumbled across the murder with him. He told me, you may remember, that there'd be another murder of the same kind."

"But that was only intelligent deduction. He gave, I remember, good reasons for it."

"Maybe. But the fact remains that there *was*

another murder of the same kind—within a few minutes from his home, and in a house whose windows his own commanded."

"What has that——?"

"He could see the staff retiring, or, if he couldn't see that, he could guess their movements from the way the lights went out and came up in the various rooms."

"But I was here on the night of Lady Wayling's murder."

"Yep. Fast asleep. Well, after the murder he got in tow with Sir Herman Wayling, and brought him round here."

"But both Miss Renton and I were here when he came."

"I know. Lucky for him, maybe. What happened to him next? He returned home, and Mr. McTavish was in his house. Within a few minutes he had a fainting fit of some kind. A fainting fit!"

"You think it wasn't a fainting fit?"

"Sir, I know it wasn't. He was knocked out. I don't know just what you think about it, but it is a little strange to me that he was found knocked out by your friend Mr. McTavish. There was no one else in that library."

"But the assailant had gone through the other door."

"Then you knew there was an assailant! That makes the story of a faint look a bit silly, doesn't it?"

"Look here, Inspector——"

"Shush, not too loudly, Mr. Armistead. And please don't harass yourself. I'm only trying to show you what I know."

"You mean what you surmise. All this is a mere tangle of possibilities." My heart had sunk, none the

less, and my belief in his chain of probabilities was as great as his own.

"Wait a while. What happened next ? Mr. McTavish got hold of a bunch of letters and persuaded us to read a deep significance into 'em. He sent you flying up to Barfield and he dragged me out to find a Mrs. Vibart. What did it all amount to, anyway ? Just this, that Lady Wayling had once taken her nephew to the seaside and hadn't wanted to part with him when the holiday was over. Well, Lady Wayling was a childless woman. Such affection for a nephew isn't rare in such circumstances."

"You forget the Cuban who worried her, there, at Barfield."

"Did a Cuban worry her ? I wonder. All we know is that a dark man called on her now and again. Surely a woman like Lady Wayling, who'd been a professional dancer, would have friends almost wherever she went —friends of all nations. And suppose her visitor was a Cuban, what of that ? You've just come back from Barfield. Did you discover anything to this man's discredit ?"

I wasn't prepared in view of his present suspicion and evident purpose to say what I had discovered, but I had to confess that I had found nothing against the Cuban visitor to Barfield, unless inadvertently allowing his landlady's young daughter to mistake civility for love was a crime.

"Look here, Inspector," I said, "all this suggestion that McTavish committed or caused to be committed these two horrible murders is nonsense. There's nothing you've said about him that mightn't apply to Miss Renton or me."

"No. There's a difference. We know exactly where

you were for quite a long time before the Cuban was found. We've checked up your movements. And as for the girl—well, she may very well have had some hand in the business. It was a strange way to find a corpse. Why did her quest for a job take her to that quarter just at the right time to join forces with Mr. McTavish in the discovery? She came from Barfield, where McTavish sent you to confuse the scent. What did you learn there?"

"Well, I . . ."

Innocent Ipps noted my hesitation.

"Say, Mr. Armistead, I don't doubt you've got an affection for our friend Mr. McTavish. He's an unusual and attractive figure. But your duty is to help the law, you know."

"I suppose it is, but I don't see why I should help the law to make an ass of itself. And yet . . ."

There was no valid reason for withholding anything, so I gave him a brief outline of what I had learnt at Barfield.

It was a queer recital. While he talked and I listened I had been intent only upon the significance of the line he was pursuing. Now that I talked for a few minutes I became aware of our setting, this odd room of McTavish's with the red fez that he wore as a smoking-cap flung on to one corner of the table and catching a corner of the riband of light from the Inspector's torch, a riband directed to me and leaving him in the darkness beyond, so that he was only a huge shadow and a voice. Both of us were astrain for the first sound of McTavish's entry. What would follow that I did not know. Probably Ipps would hold him up at the pistol point, like a man in a melodrama, and call upon me to assist him. I did not relish an

assault upon McTavish, whom, as Ipps had guessed, I had come greatly to like. I wondered, too, what would happen if Amy Renton were to return, and hoped that she had gone for the night.

Innocent Ipps listened silently to my short account of my day at Barfield.

"That certainly looks as if her presence there on the Friday night were very far from being accidental," he said when I had finished. "A pity you didn't take a photograph of that dead fellow with you. It was probably the same man."

"If it had been, somebody in Barfield would have recognized him from the newspapers. Besides, in four and a half years he'd probably be very different."

"That's certainly likely. He'd no doubt be a clean-shaven lady-killer then. But still . . . Tell me, Mr. Armistead, when those two met that night in Bishops-gate did they behave like strangers?"

"It's hard to say. The girl was distressed—frightened out of her wits—by what she'd seen. She ran into McTavish and me, and, of course, he was as soothing as he could be."

Thinking back I could not but recall the instinctive way in which she had clung to him, and the manner in which he had thrust her, as it were, into the back-ground when the constable came and questioned us.

"Yes, yes. I don't doubt he was. But after that, when you all went off together and had dinner?"

"Yes—I think they behaved like strangers. He made a guess at her history. . . ."

"And got it right?"

"Yes. Now you mention it, he did. But then, he guessed at mine, and got that right, almost, at second guess."

"All that by-play over dinner, when he offered her a job, naturally struck you as genuine ?"

"Of course it did. I'd no reason to think it other than genuine. Nor have I now, if it comes to that."

"No. Perhaps not." Something in his voice roused my temper. The odd spell that had been cast over me by the mysterious manner of my entry and the dramatic affectation of his pose in the sitting-room broke abruptly.

"Look here, Inspector——" I began.

He interrupted my outburst.

"Say, Mr. Armistead, you are as heated as if this bird McTavish were an old friend of yours. If you think he didn't do these things, you've only to convince me. Perhaps you know who did do them, if he didn't."

I was silent for a moment, chewing on this and its possible implications.

"I'll convince you that *he* didn't, at any rate," I said at length. "First of all, what would have been his motive ? Next, what about the garrotting machine ?"

Ipps laughed softly.

"Motive ? Great snakes, Mr. Armistead, we haven't to look far for a motive ! Hasn't he talked to you about murder and motives often enough ? He sure has to me."

"What has that kind of talk to do with it ?"

"Mr. McTavish is very fond of saying that if anyone committed a perfectly motiveless murder with an undetectable means, he couldn't be caught, isn't he ?"

"Yes. I've heard him advance that as a theory."

"Here's his perfectly purposeless murder. He came in from Cambridge, dropped into the hotel for a meal, fell into talk with a stranger at his table, discovered

that the man was fresh from Cuba, remembered, probably, that Lady Wayling, his neighbour in this area, was also a Cuban, and then put his theory into practice. He probably lured that fellow into that basement on the plea of giving him good coffee in that little restaurant place, which we know to be patronized by several foreigners, and of which the stranger may have heard from his compatriots in the Bishopsgate area."

"It won't do, Inspector," I said. "If McTavish were such a monstrous fiend as to murder a man merely to prove his novelist's theory about motiveless murder, why should he hang about the place, and why should he commit the second murder?"

"Did he hang about the place? I'm not sure. You remember that the courtyard where the restaurant stands runs down to an old church. By that old church is a by-pass, an old London lane, that curves back into Hounsditch. McTavish may have killed his man, slipped out of the building into the courtyard, decided to leave the courtyard by the less frequented way—remember that the later offices were just pouring out—and then walked back towards Threadneedle Street to catch a bus or something. Why, now, did he glance at all into that courtyard when you knocked into him?"

I laughed.

"Look here, Inspector, if you saw a pretty girl doing up her suspender, wouldn't you glance down a courtyard?"

"Yes. But I shouldn't see her unless I'd glanced down first."

"Oh, she'd attracted his attention just before that."

"So he says."

"Well, why should he complicate his motiveless murder by entangling himself with its consequences

so wantonly? Above all things, why should he kill Lady Wayling and attack her husband?"

"He entangled himself, as you call it, because his particular type of vanity wouldn't allow him to drop out of it when chance threw the threads of the thing about him again. Remember that he was trying to prove a theory. By alliance with me, as the official investigator on the case, he made himself—so he thought—the last person we would suspect. As for Lady Wayling, I tell you, he'd worked things out in that quick brain of his. The man was a Cuban. He wasn't content with killing him without a motive, but he gave us a false motive to work at. Garrotting, by golly! There was genius in that. First the friendless stranger and next the well-known lady, and then the cunning attempt to beat up a suspicion of a plot and a vendetta. I'll tell you, Mr. Armistead, the man's no bungling fool."

"But look here, you can't have it both ways. If you suggest that this was an unpremeditated murder done for the fun of presenting you with a motiveless crime, you can't say that the presence of Amy Renton there was not accidental."

"Why not? They may have met by assignation, and he may have sent her to make the dramatic discovery, so that he could see the effect on the police. Or she may have been there to meet the Cuban."

"But the garrotting! You don't mean that he lugged a garrotting machine to Cambridge with him, or carried it about, on the off-chance of being able to commit a motiveless murder on a Cuban! Good God, man, talk sense!"

"I said that his brain worked quickly."

"I know you did."

"He didn't have to carry a garrotting machine, Mr. Armistead. As soon as his mind leapt to the idea that here was the ideal victim for such a murder he thought like a flash how he could contrive to commit the murder in the most appropriate way, in a way that would enable him to spin one of his damned novelist's plots round us and round the dead man."

"Well . . ."

"He bought his garrotting machine as they walked from the station hotel to the little eating-house in the courtyard. His victim probably helped him to buy it."

"What ! You mean that it is so easy in Bishopsgate in the heart of the City to find a shop into which you can go and say : 'Oh, I want a nice garrotting machine to fit my friend here ; I'm just going to murder him' ? Come, Inspector Ipps, what kind of a yarn is this ?"

"It sounds absurd as you phrase it, Mr. Armistead, but I remember, to McTavish himself, saying that the man might have been killed by some quite ordinary garrotting implement, like a pair of lift-gates."

"You don't suggest now, do you, that he bought a pair of lift-gates and lugged them into the basement with his victim ! I don't believe you have the ghost of an idea of how the murder was committed."

Inspector Ipps seemed to listen for a moment before replying, as if some street noise had warned him of the return of the man whom he had been accusing.

"Mr. Armistead, I know exactly how these murders were committed, and with what implement," he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I WAITED for him to explain, but again he seemed to be listening intently to the street noises below from the Square.

"That sounds like our friend," he said, his tenor voice keyed very low.

My own senses were alert. I did not quite know what I should do when McTavish entered the place. Whether he had or had not been responsible for the two murders, I was not ready to see him walk into the trap without giving him at least some warning. Even though Inspector Ipps had communicated to me something of his own conviction, I had not yet with my mind fully realized what kind of monster McTavish must be if he were indeed the culprit. I was too full of the thought of his odd, kindly face, his friendly manner, and the general air of eccentric benevolence which emanated from him. If he were a murderer, only madness could account for such a variance between the man I had come to know and the acts he perpetrated. Not even madness, perhaps, could wholly account for it, for he would have to be not only out of his mind, but out of his soul to execute such horrors, readily as he might conceive them for his stories. It was incredible beyond words that "O, sweet McTavish",

the beloved butt and the beloved aggressor of his undergraduate generation, should be even suspected of an act of crime.

And yet, his eccentricities had at times approached violence. I remembered that my cousin had said of him that he was once thrown out of a London music-hall for assaulting a love-making Lord to whose satyr-like personality and behaviour he had objected. It was quite possible that the dead Cuban and the dead lady had aroused in him some urge to take into his hands a retribution which he had thought they deserved. Once he conceived that he had a mission to purge society of objectionable people, McTavish would, indeed, be capable of anything, I realized.

"With what, then, did he do these things ?" I asked, my voice harsh and dry.

Inspector Ipps rose from his chair in the shadow and moved over to my side of the table.

"McTavish keeps no pets here, does he ?" he asked inconsequentially.

"Pets ? No. I think not. I've seen none."

"He isn't, for example, a dog fancier ?"

"No."

"If he kept a huge dog you would have known of it ?"

"Most certainly." I failed entirely to catch his drift. "You're not now going to suggest, are you, that McTavish kept a huge hound which tore at the throats of these people ?"

"No. But how do you account for this ?"

Into the riband of the torch-light he flung down a heavy dog-collar, studded, as such things are, with ornamental bosses of metal and bearing a metal "D" through which a leash could be fastened.

"I don't account for it. It may be a collar from some dog that he once had. . . ."

"It is quite new—well, not quite, but almost. Look here, inside."

He turned the collar over and pointed with a finger to a maker's name.

"You recall that run of shops by the courtyard, don't you ?" he said as I peered at the little metal tablet to read the name. "There are two very old shops, one of which is a chemist's and the other a cutler's, where they sell alarm clocks, razors, harness, dog-collars, and the like."

The address on the little metal plate and the Inspector's words recalled the place to my memory.

"Yes, I remember it."

"That is where he bought his garrotting machine."

"What makes you think that ? Because a man buys a dog-collar from a given shop it doesn't follow that he has bought some fiendish instrument. . . ."

Ipps picked up the dog-collar.

"This is the fiendish machine," he said.

"What !"

"I'll show you." Before I could protest he had carelessly looped my own throat with the thing, the metal bosses inwards to the flesh. "You see, all I have to do now is to drop my pen-knife into the leash-loop and the buckle and a turn of my wrist will garrott you as effectually as those other two were garrotted."

He had evidently dropped his knife into the two loops as he spoke, for I felt the pressure of the metal bosses increase to the point of discomfort. Instinctively I raised my hands to grip the thing which choked me.

"You see !" said Ipps triumphantly. "Your natural action is to use your hands to loosen it. You can't

hope to do that, because you can't get your fingers between the leather and your throat. But it prevents you from fighting off your assailant."

He maintained the gentle pressure of the thing about my throat for a moment. In that moment I had a sudden flash of intuition.

"How do you know that Wayling was knocked out ?" I asked, a little chokily. Ipps standing behind me, laughed softly. Some words that McTavish had spoken of him came back to me with a new significance. Like a fool, I let my thoughts find hot, immediate words. "McTavish didn't commit those murders," I said, "but he knows who did. And, by God, so do I !"

"You do, by God !" said the soft tenor voice repeating my oath. "And so do I." There was a chuckle of inhuman laughter and the metal bosses of the dog-collar suddenly bit into my flesh. I strove to rise, but could not, for my breath was choked out of me and my head was being forced back upon my neck. I struggled for breath—tried to shout—felt a blinding shower of dancing sparks behind my hot eyeballs—felt my head bursting—and lost consciousness, sinking down into swirling deeps of rushing waters through the insistent noise of which came, like the eddy at the centre of the whirlpool, the mocking laughter of the man who was killing me.

CHAPTER THIRTY

I SHIVERED and came to myself. Water was pouring down my collar and my face was dripping. As I gasped for breath another douche hit me. It seemed that I had come up again from those horrible swirling deeps which had drummed at my ears. I put my hands to my throat to release it from the gripping, throttling collar that was no longer there.

"He'll do," said a voice. "Give him a spot of brandy."

A man's strong arm and hand was supporting my neck. I shook the water from my eyes and saw Amy Renton move over to the side-table for the brandy flask. McTavish took it from her and poured some of the spirit between my lips.

"Where is he?" I asked when I could speak.

"Who? The Innocent? He's here."

"Where?"

"Under the couch. Can you sit up?"

"I think so."

I struggled to my feet. The chair in which I had been sitting when Ipps came over to demonstrate the garrotting process was lying flat, and one or two other articles of McTavish's assorted furniture seemed to have suffered in some kind of struggle.

"What happened?"

"I left my return a few seconds too late. That was all. He gave you just a twist too many. I'm sorry, Armistead, but it was one of us for it."

"I don't follow. . . ."

"No. Of course you don't. But sit down quietly over there for a moment. Hello, good girl!"

Amy, who had left the room, came in again with a hand towel and one of my collars.

"Quite domestic, isn't she?" said McTavish, as I dried myself as best I could, and repaired the ravages to my appearance.

There was a loud knocking at the outer door.

"Here they come. Let 'em in, Amy," said McTavish.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"The police—the real police."

"Wasn't Ipps the real police?"

"Well, yes. He was Inspector Ipps, all right. But his conception of his functions was a bit *outré*."

A uniformed police official and two constables came in briskly and brusquely.

"Well, sir?"

"Your man's under the couch, there."

"What! Have you killed him?"

"Killed him! Good, Lord no. He'll hang all right. If you want a third charge against him, the attempted murder of my friend will be quite easy to prove. There are two independent witnesses."

"If what you told them at the Yard is sound, sir, we shan't want any extra charges."

The two constables had lugged the heavy form of Innocent Ipps from behind the couch. The uniformed officer, whose rank was, I think, also that of an Inspector, looked down at the prostrate man.

"You seem to have given him his medicine," he said.

"I had to hit pretty hard."

The uniformed Inspector bent down and felt his colleague's heart.

"Ah! He's all right. Who tied his wrists and feet?"

"I did."

"And a good job you've made of it. Old Ipps—the Innocent—who'd ha' thought it of him? Pick him up."

The constables picked him up.

"How are you taking him?" I asked.

"We've brought an ambulance."

"An ambulance?"

"Mr. McTavish's instructions." He grinned at me. "Good night, gentlemen. Good night, miss."

"Good night. You won't want us round there to-night?"

"No. To-morrow morning will do."

"Oh, one moment, Inspector. Take careful charge of this. It's your main piece of concrete evidence."

He flung the dog-collar across the room. The officer caught it with admirable dexterity.

"Thank you, sir. I won't lose this." He looked at it reflectively. "Odd, that this thing should have killed two people. I wonder what made him think of it?"

"Heaven knows. Perhaps because he thought of the mute with the bow-string. Perhaps because the man he was going to murder was called Pedro, which is the name given to a dog so frequently. Perhaps because he realized in a flash as he passed the shop where he bought it how admirably it would reproduce the

physical signs of garrotting. Perhaps he'll tell you when he comes to himself—and perhaps he won't. Good night, Inspector."

The Inspector went, Amy carefully closing the door behind him.

McTavish stooped and took off his shoes, slipped his feet into a pair of ragged old carpet slippers, decorated his grotesque head with the scarlet fez that was his smoking-cap, and began to fill the porcelain pipe.

"Now then, Amy, show a leg!"

"What?"

"I'm sorry. Army technicality for displaying energy. What I meant was, what about a bite of food after all that crude melodrama? Here's poor Armistead faint from want of sustenance. You'll find a big pork-pie and a carton of potato salad on the top of my wardrobe, and there should be some beer under the little wash-handstand. Thus endeth McTavish's first case. Sounds like an antique novel for the young—*Jessica's First Prayer—Christy's Old Organ.*"

"Listen, McTavish. I'm all at sea."

"You don't say!" he retorted in imitation of Ipp's favourite ejaculation. "Well, I'll tell you all there is to tell, there's little to relate, I saw an aged, aged man a-sitting on a gate——"

"Shut up!" said Amy Renton, with placid rudeness to her employer. "Can't you see the man isn't equal to your babble. How would you feel if you'd been nearly garrotted?"

"Put down that pie, young woman, and don't harass me. Do you know what happens when the hangsman comes to hang Punch and gets hanged himself for his pains?"

"What?"

"Punch spends a few minutes wootle-tootling about the proscenium. Wootle-tootle. Wootle-tootle. Wootle-too . . . Come on, Armistead, draw up a chair and see if that lacerated throat of yours can swallow still." He burst into song:

"Oh, my!
My tastes may not be high,
But I do like a corner
Off a nice meat pie.

Do you remember Lottie Levane singing that at the old Oxford? Of course you don't. You're too young, Amy, and Armistead is too staid. Now then, Mr. Wu, what is it you want to know?"

"Well, first of all, I want to know how you discovered that Ipps was our man."

"I didn't."

"You didn't!"

"No. I only guessed. I have medals and cups and shields and things for successful guessing. My two hobbies as a boy—guessing and floating." He gulped down half a tumbler of beer. "The modern worship of athletics. The cult of the strenuous life. When I wasn't guessing, I was floating. Sometimes as I floated I guessed whether if I turned over I'd be able to swim. Fortunately I never tried."

I refused to be drawn by his bantering nonsense.

"Well, how did you guess?" I asked patiently.

"Ah, I'm not quite sure how I guessed. But, first of all, I began by being perfectly sure that whoever had done that first murder, it wasn't I. I've done some crazy things, but I haven't murdered anybody yet. When Amy broke her whatsitsname that night and came running into our arms, I was perfectly honest and

ingenuous in wanting to hang on to the mystery until we or the police had solved it. Besides, I liked the look of Amy's knee. . . ." He gave her a kindly leer, and she grimaced at him. "When Ipps came and had dinner with us that night three things struck me about him."

He ticked them off on his fingers. "First, he'd spent most of his early official life in some kind of traffic between England and the Americas, and had even acquired a kind of mild transatlantic accent. Next, he'd been fairly intimate with some dead and gone murderer called 'The Mexican Ripper', who had taught him the trick of rolling his cigarettes Spanish fashion. And thirdly, his interest in murders seemed to me to be just a leetle too intense even for a detective. After all, a detective is really more of a thief-taker than a murderer hunter. But Ipps spoke of the many killers he'd taken, and of criminal lunatics, with a kind of quiet gloat in his voice. I could almost imagine he collected them as a boy collects locomotive numbers, entering them in a little book, or notching them on a stick, beginning with Limehouse Loo, of whom he told us. From collecting murderers to collecting murders isn't a far step. I confess the fact that he, with his early experience of America and South America, should have been put on to this case struck me first merely as a coincidence or as one of those occasions when the Yard knows more than it tells. And then, don't you know, I remembered that it was he who had found Limehouse Loo and arrested the crazy doctor who was responsible for the series of revolting murders of women of which Limehouse Loo was merely one incident."

"What had that to do with it?"

"I am forty-two years of age. Limehouse Loo's

murderer was arrested and became a nine days' sensation when I was a very little chap indeed. I incautiously said as much to Ipps over dinner."

"But, still . . ."

"Ipps was then a constable. He can't, let us suppose, have been under twenty. That makes him at least sixty now. A man of his capacity who stays in the detective service until that age—with his record of successes—doesn't find himself quite casually assigned to murders by some kind of duty rota. No. One might expect a man like Ipps to take up a case when others had failed, but not to take it up at the start, when there might be no real case in it. I made my first guess when that occurred to me, and it was that for some purpose of his own Ipps had had himself put on to the case. Then I began guessing what that purpose might be."

"Well?"

"It might, I thought, be that Ipps knew more of the dead man than he told, and that he was really after some South American gang of criminals of whom the dead man was a unit. The murder itself, without real clue to the perpetrator, without any apparent motive, was baffling. According to the report that the dead man had just arrived from a South American boat there was no suspicion that anyone had crossed with him. What we were told of his movements the day of his arrival seemed to preclude the idea that his landing had been notified to someone this side and that he had been marked down and killed. Of two things, one. Either the murder would remain an isolated crime or it would be followed by another. I guessed at the second. And I was right. Ipps, for some purpose of his own, had taken up the case. The

case, therefore, could not be a mere single murder with no hidden implications. Well, the second murder took place."

Amy and I nodded. McTavish pushed aside his plate, reached for another, helped himself to cheese and biscuits and resumed his tale. In my interest I had forgotten my aching throat and head.

"The second murder took place within a few seconds' walk from this house, in a place commanded by my windows. The victim was also a Cuban. From the moment that it occurred, Ipps seemed intent upon making a case against me. Now I, as I said, had begun with one solid fact—that of my own innocence. Your presence in Bishopsgate that night, Armistead, might or might not have been as innocent as it seemed. Amy's discovery might or might not have been the accident it looked. But I was clear enough in my conscience. Why, then, did Ipps suspect me?"

"Well," I interjected, "your manner and behaviour, you know, is never quite that of an ordinary person."

"No, thank God! But no skilled detective suspects the nearest eccentric just because he is near and is eccentric. No. What Ipps was trying to do was to fasten the double crime on to somebody against whom he could frame a compelling circumstantial case. Even his own meal in the restaurant with the dead man helped him. He, too, is a big man, who might, by some hasty-eyed waiter accustomed to a steady drift of divines, be mistaken for some non-conforming cleric. But it couldn't possibly be that Ipps was out on the trail merely to give himself a mock-triumph in the evening of his days. Mark you, in my guessing competition, I wasn't yet assuming—why should I have

assumed ?—that Ipps could himself be the murderer. That horrible thought came later."

"How did it come ?"

"It came from two things. The first was the guilt of Amy Renton."

"What !" cried Amy, leaping from her chair.

"The guilt of Amy Renton," repeated McTavish calmly and with a new sternness in his voice. "Sit down."

"But——"

"Sit down !"

She sat down obediently, her face blanched and her eyes a little frightened.

"Your story of visiting Mosowski for a job was true enough. I never doubted it. But when you went to Liverpool Street station for some tea instead of waiting for Mosowski's return, you went to keep another apointment, did you not ?"

"Yes."

"With whom ?"

She did not answer him.

"I'll tell you with whom. It was with Pedro Fadrique."

"Lady Wayling's brother-in-law !" I cried.

"No. The brother-in-law's brother. The paying-guest at Amy's home."

"How do you know that, Mr. McTavish ?" I asked.

"I overheard you telling Ipps all about it just before he began his attack on you. I was in the hall. That was why you went to Liverpool Street station, Amy, wasn't it ?"

"Yes."

"You went back to keep your appointment with

Mosowski. Fadrique went into the hotel restaurant to dine ?"

"Yes."

"You hadn't finished your talk with him ?"

"No."

"And you had arranged to meet at the little tea-rooms in the courtyard ?"

"Yes."

"He incautiously told the pleasant stranger at the table where he was going, and the pleasant stranger obligingly walked over with him. They stopped to buy a dog-collar."

Amy Renton's composure collapsed. She burst into a storm of tears. I moved hastily over towards her, but McTavish was quicker than I.

"Come, come, don't cry, girl, don't cry ! You've done nothing wrong except kept silence. Why didn't you say you knew who he was when you found him ?"

"I was frightened—frightened."

McTavish's avuncular arm round her shoulders pacified her. Her storm of tears subsided into recurring sobs.

"Why had he come to England ? To meet you ?"

"No. To tell Lady Wayling something."

"To tell her what ?"

"I don't know."

"Did you know Lady Wayling ?"

"No. I knew he used to visit some woman at Barfield, and that he had a quarrel with her."

"What was there between you and him ?"

"Nothing. Nothing wrong. When he was staying with us I had a kind of schoolgirl's infatuation for him. But he was clean and straight with me. There

wasn't any of my infatuation left when I met him that horrible night."

"How was the appointment made?"

"He wrote saying that he would be in London. That was why I left Barfield, on the pretext of finding a job here—to be here when he arrived."

"Why did you meet at Liverpool Street?"

"He rang me up from his hotel. I had to meet him somewhere there, because I had the appointment with Mosowski. If I hadn't met him there he wouldn't have been killed. . . ."

"Oh, yes, he would. You must never blame yourself for that. Ipps would have got him sooner or later."

"But why should Ipps want to get him?" I asked.

"Amy, make me some tea—unless you'd prefer coffee, you two?"

"No, no," I said impatiently, "tea will do."

"Well, let me tell you next of the second thing which made me guess that Ipps might be the actual murderer. You remember that morning at Wayling's house, Armistead? We saw Wayling enter the library. I followed him within a very few seconds, and found him knocked out. The corridor down which we had walked from the butler's quarters was the only means of access to the library."

"It had two doors."

"I know it had two doors, but both opened on to the same corridor. We had seen nobody in that corridor. So whoever knocked out Wayling was already in the library. I dashed out after his aggressor, through the baize door, and found nobody but Ipps placidly sauntering towards Tollinson's door. That placid back was a shade too placid. It set me thinking. The alternative that the assailant had passed under the

stairs to the far corridor would not hold water. You, at the library door, or the maid in the hall would have seen him."

"But the assault on Wayling was one of Ipps's strongest cards against you."

"I know. The prosecuting counsel would have made great play with it if Ipps had built up his case."

"But even so, McTavish, I don't even remotely glimpse Ipps's motive. . . ."

"The letters, Armistead, the letters!"

"What of them?"

" 'I shall stay here with the boy, whatever "I" may do'," he quoted. "I thought that 'I' stood for Isabella, the sister. It stood for Ipps."

"But how could Ipps affect Lady Wayling's nephew?"

"Ah! Now we come to the widest guess of all. Ipps had spent his early life amongst American criminals. He knew something which gave him at least the power to menace the boy's relatives. We have still to discover what that something was."

"I can tell you," said Amy. "He knew about Pedro's brother, Juan Fadrique, the little boy's father."

"What did he know about him?"

"About his past. He was a criminal. Ipps had once arrested him, and once nearly arrested him."

"Once nearly arrested him?"

"Yes. Juan was a kind of king-smuggler. When Prohibition came in, he became a bootlegger."

"Ah! And Ipps with his transatlantic experience would naturally be put on to bootleggers. What happened? That's an easy guess. Ipps began to take his share of the boodle as the price of a shocking neglect

of duty. And Pedro found it out and came over to tell Lady Wayling that the threat which had been hanging over her and her sister and the boy could be countered by menacing Ipps himself. Ipps, knowing this, made a midnight assignation with Lady Wayling ; murdered her, and telephoned his own crime to the Press."

"That certainly seems feasible," I said.

"More than feasible, surely. In any event, it will all come out now that we have a line on to the real culprit. The Yard won't have much difficulty in giving their counsel a good brief."

"There are two things I still don't follow."

"What are they ?"

"Why did Ipps try to murder *me* ?"

"That was my low cunning, my boy. I wanted him to show his hand. My guesses, after all, were little more than guesses up to that point. I arranged the attack on you."

"But how ?"

"When we started off on the track revealed by those letters and Tollinson put us on to the line leading to Mrs. Vibart, it occurred to me that I might confuse Ipps a little in his determination to implicate me by throwing a few suspicions on to you. It was to keep his attention on you that I sent you packing off to Barfield with his concurrence. I led him to suppose that we both knew more than we had revealed. I guessed from a study of the time-table that you would probably be home about the time you arrived and lied gallantly to Ipps by saying you had wired me that you had discovered everything. He was painfully anxious to know what that 'everything' might be. I sent Amy home in his presence and then invented an

inquiry for myself down at the docks. As far as he knew, I was still hot on the scent of some South American conspiracy. He came back here, as you know. His game, I think, was to down me when I came back, having downed you—the official story being that he had tried to arrest me for the three murders—and your sudden exclamation that we both knew who was the real murderer quickened his resolution."

"The three murders?"

"Yes. Three people garrotted by O. Swete McTavish. Pedro Fadrique, Lady Wayling, and the gentle Armistead. Good, wasn't it? Your murder would have been a most damning one. I should have scraped your acquaintance over the Cuban, have allowed you to discover too much about me, and then garrotted you. He, entering at the right moment, would have tried to arrest and been compelled to kill me."

"The fiend!"

"It actually panned out the other way. I entered at the right moment, and was compelled to knock him out."

"But tell me, who were the people who followed us? There was one of them on my heels at Barfield."

"Ah, they were Ipps's helpers! By having us shadowed he compiled—or would have compiled—a whole series of suspicious movements."

"I see."

Amy Renton began casually to clear the remains of our meal from the table.

"Look here!" I said. "That day you went to see the attaché . . ."

"What of it?"

"You remember that day, Amy?"

"Quite well. We went to the pictures."

"And you slipped out during a film and telephoned to somebody."

"I certainly didn't. I slipped out, yes. And I went into the telephone-box, and stupidly forgot my gloves. But I didn't telephone to anybody."

"Then why . . ."

All traces of her recent agitation had gone. She was smiling now, and as she spoke her pale face was suffused by a most charming blush.

"It's too absurd. But I broke my suspender."

"What!" we both roared at her.

"It was the same one. I'd only faked it up with a needle and cotton, and it went again. I didn't dare to tell you in case you thought I made a habit of it. And I didn't dare to claim my gloves in case the man had seen me through the glass of the telephone-box door."

"The girl isn't fit to be at large," said McTavish.

"I don't think she will be for long," I said.

"Mr. Armistead, you really are a dear," she said, "but you get some terribly wrong notions into your head."

I jumped up and took the tray from her. She held the door for me, and I passed through to the little kitchenette. When I came back she was still holding the door open. Framed in its lintels, like a figure seen through a stage proscenium, I saw McTavish sprawling along his couch, the big Punch-like face crowned by the ridiculous red fez, and the tight, whimsical mouth decorated by the preposterous porcelain pipe that protruded from it. He looked now less like a non-

conforming cleric than some grotesque figure from an old German beer-flagon. I said as much with my own mouth close to Amy Renton's little ear. She sighed as happily as if she had never had any infatuation for a dubious Cuban, never seen a murdered man, never been herself suspected of crime.

" 'O, sweet McTavish!' " she said.

THE END

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